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By DON TRACY

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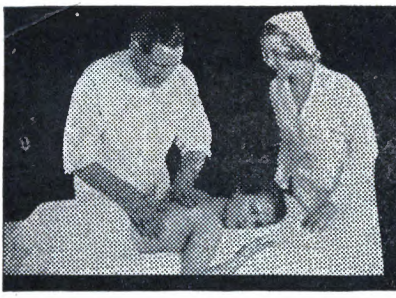

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Vol. XXVI, No. 2 EVERY STORY BRAND NEW February, 1944

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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

REMEMBER that we made it our Official Business to tip you off last issue that this number was going to be pretty good? Well, gather around the sergeant's desk and we'll unload some interesting information about the next issue.

There is an excellent short novel coming up for trial that will have you sitting out on the edge of your seat and breathlessly awaiting the outcome. For no less a person than the eminent District Attorney is on trial—for murder! In FRAME FOR MURDER, the featured story by Henry Kuttner, we have a powerful drama of conflicting interests and wily, ruthless criminals who fight back in a deadly manner at the one man most inimical to their schemes.

Duke Yardley, new and crusading, vigorous district attorney, had clamped down on crime in Knoxville. Thugs, gunsels, racketeers, gamblers, dope peddlers—sixteen of them!—were in jail for the first time in their lives. Not that they were first offenders—no! The trouble was, it was next to impossible to make an arrest, let alone get a conviction, in racket-ridden Knoxville.

Until the new district attorney had clamped down. He had helped make some of the arrests himself. A tough and hard-hitting man, Duke Yardley.

An Ingenious Frame

So—he had to go. But crooks couldn't fire a guardian and upholder of the law. And it wasn't feasible to take him for a one-way ride. So Yardley had to be framed. And the criminal geniuses who headed the local rackets proceed to give Duke Yardley the business.

The ingenious manner in which they do this, and the utter ruthlessness with which they carry out their plans is enough to make an honest person shudder in horror.

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And his life is not the only prize Duke Yardley has to fight for. Nor is his honor. For, also, there is Jessica.

But we're not going to tell you the entire story here. Next issue is when District Attorney Duke Yardley is placed in jeopardy of his life, honor, and, happiness, and that is when you will get the full details of this fast-moving, dramatic novel.

A Close Shave

Another special plum for you lovers of detective stories will be a long and exciting novelet about our old friend, little Joe Bunt, the Greenwich Village barber.

Little Joe, the amateur but ardent student of criminology, has had many ups and downs in his thrilling brushes with the underworld, and even with his close shaves with death among members of the upper crust. For the impulse and desire to kill is not confined to the criminal element of society.

In this story by Laurence Donovan, COIFFEURED TO KILL, Joe Bunt starts out innocently on a lady's hair-do —and winds up in a murder and a mari-

(*Continued on page* 10)

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Hate, hate, hate, says Hitler. Hate, hate, hate, say those who echo him, here and everywhere.

But this is America! And America is made up practically 100% of Protestants, Catholics and Jews. In the three quotations above, Hitler takes in just about all of us.

Nobody left out! Because, you see, it's really a suicide pact to which we're all invited. *It was meant to be so.* A suicide pact for all America.

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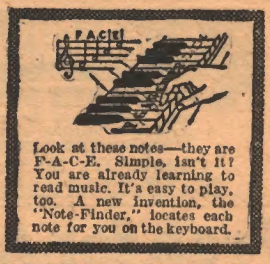

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462 Niagara Street Buffalo, New York

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(*Continued from page 6*)

juana racket which leads him in a dizzy, deadly dance of death until he reaches a sane solution that will save his own skin.

Once again Author Donovan has us hanging onto the ropes as Joe Bunt fares furiously forth to a fighting finish. Oh, yes, his red-haired girl friend, Della Corcoran, is thoroughly mixed up in the affair, too. So you may be sure that you and Joe are due for a corking Corcoran time of it.

Besides the two long stories mentioned above, there will be a number of punchy and crisp short yarns of crime and mystery and detection which are calculated to keep you awake even after your bedtime if you dare start to read them. In fact, next issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE is going to be an exceptionally good number for everybody except the crooks.

Letters from Readers

Everybody—report in like good detectives and let us know what you think about this magazine! Here are two or three flashes.

I liked "Pay Telephone," by Len Zinberg, very much in your October issue. Short and snappy. Sincerely—*Jack Diamond, Pittsburgh, Pa.*

And so is your comment, Jack. Thanks very much. That's just what we keep telling all the readers down here at the office. Don't overlook the short stories just because we don't mention them at great length in this department. Many a good short has gone neglected through carelessness.

Here's a note from Kentucky:

I have just finished reading the October issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE, and I think it is the best one yet. "The Fingernail Clue," by Laurence Donovan, was the best novelet I ever read. Let's have more Joe Bunt stories. And I think the Willie Klump stories are wonderful. Mark me down as a steady reader of POPULAR DETECTIVE.—*Shelby Brammer, Susie, Kentucky.*

Good for you, Shelby. You'll be glad to note then that Joe Bunt will be with us next issue in another long novelet. And we had better add right here that Willie Klump will be present in another hilarious adventure where he tangles with crime and with Satchelfoot Kelly

in a side-splitting short called IT COULD ONLY HAPPEN TO WILLIE.

And here's still another slant on the same October issue:

I just finished reading "Death Is My Gift," by Sam Merwin, Jr., in your October issue. Now that was my idea of a REAL story. Let's have more like that one. If I could write interesting stories like that one I'd think I was a king. This was my first copy of POPULAR DETECTIVE Magazine, but you can just bet it won't be my last.—*Robert Gillingham, Richland Center, Wisc.*

Robert, you have our unqualified approval. And so do all you others who have written in about our October and December numbers. There was hardly a squawk in the whole carload.

But don't make us feel too good. If you have a small brickbat to hurl, as well as bouquets, toss 'em right in. We are always cordially glad to get honest comments from our readers. We'll print what we can.

Just address your communications to The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. And, meanwhile, the best of reading to you!

—THE EDITOR.

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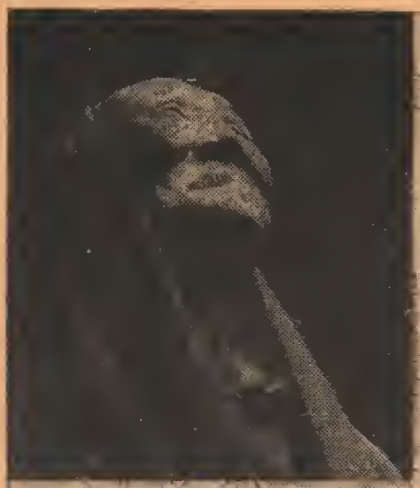

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Mine host kept on talking as a thin stream of music emerged from the radio

THE IRISH DEATH TRAP

By DON TRACY

Everybody was out of step except Private Francis Xavier Murphy—until it was time to crack down on criminal saboteurs!

CHAPTER I
CONVOY

THE big transport *Palomar*, once a luxury liner with an Atlantic record to her credit, began zigzagging as her submarine warning siren blaréd. Lean, gray destroyers foamed through the sea on each flank of the mammoth ship, their crews at their gun stations and their Y-guns ready to loose the lethal depth charges that had sent many of Admiral Raeder's *Unterseeboots* down to depths for which they never had been built; depths from which they would emerge only when Atlantis broke the ocean surface again.

"Yaa-a-a-y!" hollered Private Francis Xavier Murphy. "Lookit them destroyers! I bet them Krauts are running fer home now, and ten will get you twenty if you think they make it!"

"They ain't doin' no runnin'," observed the lanky soldier beside Murphy

A BAFFLING COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL

at the rail. "That li'l streak of white foam comin' this way ain't a porpoise, chum."

Private Murphy's eyes widened as he watched the line of white foam streak toward the big transport. The wake grew as the torpedo slashed its way toward the huge target. The loudspeaker aboard the transport hoarsely bellowed:

"Torpedo! Port bow!"

The transport, for all her size, was quick to respond to the warning. She swung off her course with a lurch that sent half a dozen men sprawling as they reached frantically for hand-holds.

Private Murphy clutched the rail and hung on. His eyes followed the course of the torpedo as it lunged past the bow of the transport, missing by a matter of what seemed inches to the soldier from New York's Hell's Kitchen, and what must have been no more than ten feet.

"Holy smoke!" Murphy grunted. "That Kraut nearly got us! The—"

There was a series of explosive epithets directed at the torpedo, the submarine, its captain and crew, and so on up to the "intuitive" *Herr* Hitler, himself.

"Uh-huh," the man beside Murphy said easily. "And now them destroyers have got the Kraut. He showed his hand when he unloaded that tin fish. Fun's a-comin' now."

THE destroyers were converging on the spot where, for a fleeting moment, the German sub's periscope had broken water. The Y-guns hurled their ash cans in wide flings. There was a moment's silence as the warships swept over the spot where the sub had been. Then the sea erupted violently, hurling tall columns of water into the air as T.N.T. tortured the ocean depths.

And, crashing up into the spray-swept air with the explosions, came the rent and gaping bow of a submarine, the slender snout of the undersea wolf. For a moment, the wrecked sub seemed to hang suspended. Then, while the soldiers aboard the transport screamed their delight, it began its long, long journey down to the black world of the ocean floor.

"That's tellin' 'em!" enthused Private Francis Xavier Murphy. "That's showin' them Krauts they can't fool around with your Uncle Sam."

"Sure," observed his companion gloomily. "But one sub gone don't mean we're safe where we're goin' to. Sometimes these blame things hunt in packs. You don't see them destroyers layin' off the hunt, do you, just because they got one U-boat?"

That was true. The destroyers were circling their precious ward now, heaving their depth charges prolifically in a wide arc about the big ship. For almost half an hour, the furious bombardment kept up until, at length, the warships seemed satisfied that no more of the enemy possibly could be within striking distance.

The transport's siren sounded its "All Clear". Color began flowing back into the faces of some of the soldiers who, while they were ready and willing to take a machine-gun bullet or a shell burst where it hurt, had a horror of the green depths beneath them.

Private Murphy shifted his life-belt so that he could pull a bedraggled pack of cigarettes from his tunic pocket. He offered one to the gloomy soldier who stood beside him at the rail. The private accepted the smoke with a brief grunt of thanks.

Exhaling a long ribbon of smoke that was whirled away by the wind, Murphy gazed out over the boundless waters that surrounded the transport.

"Jeepers," he said. "Who'd ever think that Frank Murphy would ever be goin' to Yoorup on one of the biggest ships that ever sailed? I used to watch this baby dock in the North River, when it was carryin' millionaires, strictly, and I'd have gave my left lung to be able to take a trip on her. So I grab the Hoboken ferry and try to make out I was on this big baby. And now, look at me! Ridin' in style to . . . Hey, chum, where do you think we're headin' for?"

"Ireland," the taciturn man said informatively. "Some place called Lough Foyle, if that means anything to you."

Murphy shook his head.

"Not me," he said. "I've heard the old man talk about Dingle Bay and County Kerry and Dromcolliher and a couple of other places, but I never heard of no Lough Foyle. What is it, a town or somethin'?"

The tall man at the rail cast the man beside him a brief glance. He saw a short, stocky, red-haired soldier with

"Dolts! Stupid ones! I serve der Fuehrer!"

bright blue eyes and a pugnacious jaw, a man eager for information about this world that lay outside the confines of Hell's Kitchen, New York.

"You're a swell Irishman," the gloomy one said. "You ought to know that County Kerry is in Eire—the Free State—and where we're going is Ulster, Northern Ireland. They ain't landin' any American troops in the Free State—yet."

"No kiddin'?" asked Murphy. He considered his cigarette carefully. "You sure know a lot of things I never heard before. Where did you hear we was goin' to Ireland? I kind of had the ideer we was bound for Tunisia or one of them places."

THE tall man snapped his cigarette and watched it drop into the ocean, far below.

"Nuts," he said negligently. "I thought everybody knew we were goin' to Ireland. I was in a bar, just before we embarked, and everybody was talkin' about it. The bartender, he gets his news straight from the source."

"Whereabouts is this bar you mean?"

"Oh, it's one of them little dumps along Sixth Avenue. Name of it is Raymon's Bar. It's a midtown dump."

"That place, huh?" asked Francis Xavier. "I been in there a couple of times. They get the dope, huh?"

"They shore seem to. Leastwise, they ain't told me anything wrong yet. I heard about the convoy that hit Casablanca and them other places a week before it was in the papers."

"I got to look up that spot," Private Murphy told himself. "There's a joint that might tell a guy like me what's goin' on."

He turned as there was a tap on his shoulder. A square-jawed man with a face like rare beef and eyes that drilled into Murphy like twin augers stood there. He wore a first sergeant's stripes and he was not smiling. One wondered whether he had ever smiled since he got those stripes.

"Murphy," he barked, "what trouble have you got yourself into now?"

"Me, Sarge?" asked Private Francis Xavier Murphy, with feigned astonishment.

His eyebrows arched in an expression of injured innocence. He held one hand on his life jacket, fingers spread, as though he was staggered by the intimation that he could ever get into trouble.

"Yeah, you," growled the top sergeant.

"Honest to John, Sarge, I ain't—"

"You can stow that stuff, Murphy," the sergeant interrupted. "The captain don't send for any yard birds like you unless he's goin' to put you on the carpet. He hasn't got around to invitin' privates to tea, yet. And he wants to see you, pronto!"

Murphy's round, Irish face fell perceptibly. He wrinkled his brow in thought.

"Now what," he muttered quietly, "would he have found out, now? I mean, what does he think he's found out?"

"You'll find out in a few seconds," the top sergeant warned. "Now suppose you double-quick up to the captain's stateroom and get what's comin' to you. You ought to know the way. You've been there enough times on this trip."

"Okay," said Murphy reluctantly. "But I don't see—"

With dragging feet that had no "double-quick" in them, Private Murphy hauled himself to the door of the captain's stateroom and knocked.

"Come in," ordered a deep voice.

Murphy opened the door and slipped inside. The man behind the makeshift desk wore heavy eyebrows and a look almost as forbidding as the top sergeant's had been.

The officer jerked his head silently toward the door and Murphy expertly twisted the key in the lock behind him.

CHAPTER II

Undercover Assignment

AN AMAZING metamorphosis came over Private Francis Xavier Murphy. Where he had been the uncertain yard bird on his way to get a dressing down from his captain, now he seemed to don an expression of authority that matched the captain's own.

His salute to the man behind the desk was perfunctorily courteous, but nothing more than that. To anyone who might

have witnessed the strange scene, it would have appeared that Private Murphy thought his rating equal to, if not higher, than the captain's.

Captain George Parker slid a pack of cigarettes across the desk and Murphy accepted one easily, with brief thanks. When the white tube was alight, Murphy chose the chair opposite the captain, sat down, and leaned his elbows on the desk-top.

He spoke around the cigarette, puffs of smoke punctuating his speech.

"I talked to him," he said, and his English was perfect, and not at all the Hell's Kitchen argot he had used on deck. "I think he's perfectly okay, but we better put an eye on him. My opinion is that his worst fault is that he talks too much. It wasn't any trouble pumping him."

"All Americans talk too much," said the captain, with a trace of bitterness. "If we people ever would learn to keep our mouths shut, the work of G-Two—yes, and of the F.B.I.—would be cut in half."

"And then, maybe," said Murphy, with a grin, "you'd be stuck on some office detail in Washington and have to fight the Battle of Constitution Avenue twice a day. Seriously, though, the subject talked only after that sub attack. Things like that are apt to loosen tongues. We've got to be fair."

Captain Parker fiddled with a pencil, scowling.

"About that sub attack," he said thoughtfully. "Of course, a transport like this has got to be expected to run certain risks, but there have been too blamed many funny things happening to this ship on this voyage.

"You know about the trouble in the engine room, the sawdust emergency rations in the lifeboats. Well, maybe that was to be expected, too, on a ship that's carrying so many men. Traitors, subversive elements, have to be watched for in a crowd this size. But four sub attacks in three days is a bit too much of a bad thing."

Murphy dragged on his cigarette.

"You think the ship's course was known?" he asked.

Captain Parker ran his fingers through his graying hair.

"I know well enough her departure time was known," he said. "And I know the enemy was pretty well informed about our destination."

"I think I've got a lead on that," Murphy said. "There's a bar on Sixth Avenue." He gave the address. "There's a lot of loose talk being thrown around in that place. Our friend on deck, for instance, learned that we were bound for Ireland and our sailing time, before anybody but the tops were supposed to know it. He says he heard about it at that bar.

"I'm notifying my chief to put a couple of plants in the place and see if any leads can be picked up. Of course, a few glasses too many gets certain people talking. A bartender or a waiter or another customer might have been able to pick up scraps of information that could have been pieced together by the other side."

CAPTAIN PARKER nodded. There were deep lines in his face that bespoke the weight of his responsibility. As a G-2 officer, it was his job to cooperate with the G-man, Murphy, in the running down of spies, saboteurs, malcontents and others who menaced the success of this expedition.

"I'll put an eye on our friend—Thornton—and we'll see how he acts when we land," he finally said. "That should be some time tonight, according to the bridge. From that time on you'll be more or less on your own."

Murphy nodded unconcernedly.

"I'm rather used to working alone," he said. "This Irish map of mine and my Eleventh Avenue background makes it easier sometimes for me to work solo than if I had the whole Department helping me. I don't think it would be wise for you to call me up here any more, Captain. Of course, I've managed to do enough things wrong to warrant you having me on the carpet on the hour and the half-hour, but somebody might wonder why I'm not thrown in the brig."

"Okay, Inspector," said Captain Parker. "We might as well say our good-bys now, then. I'll be going back aboard this ship, you know. Sudden recall for special duty and all that sort of thing."

His mouth became a grim, straight line and his fist pounded the desk-top softly.

"You've got a big job, Murphy—the devil of a big job!" he said. "That sabotage has got to be stopped! The man or men responsible for it have got to be captured or . . . Well, I suppose the order is 'bring 'em back alive.' But when I think of the thousands of men you've got to look over, the crowd you've got to sift to get at the right parties, I'm thinking of what a staggering amount of work lies ahead of you."

Inspector Murphy of the F.B.I. nodded, his own face darkening slightly.

"It'll be no soft touch," he admitted, "but if I can do it, I—well, I'll feel that I'm really doing something in this man's war. When I think of all the thousands of dollars' worth of equipment—stuff that's needed right now—that's been ruined, the lives that freak accidents have cost, the morale-breaking lies that have been circulated among the men, it would make me mighty proud to break up that sabotage ring, if it is a ring."

The two men were silent, thinking over the task that lay ahead of "Private" Francis Xavier Murphy.

The F.B.I. inspector, one of the crack men of that great organization, was on duty so special that only a handful of men at the top of the Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation and the Army's G-2 knew of it. The case had developed several weeks previously, soon after thousands of American troops had made their first landing in Ulster Ireland.

From the American headquarters had come a stream of coded messages, all speaking of a dangerous sabotage epidemic that had broken out in the Irish camps and supply depots. There had been fires of mysterious origin, mechanical break-downs that had wrecked mobile equipment, food stocks spoiled, fire extinguishers suddenly found to contain gasoline—with distastrous results.

At first, the supposition had been that the mechanical defects and the items such as the gas-filled extinguishers had been engineered by enemy agents in the United States, at the point of origin. Inspection of the equipment had been made more and more rigid.

F.B.I. agents had moved into the plants producing the equipment. Every employe of those plants had had his or her background thoroughly investigated. All tips, no matter how impossible, had been run down quickly and completely.

Finally, as the sabotaging continued in Ireland, whereas identical equipment going to the other fronts was found to be in perfect shape, the obvious explanation was that the sabotage campaign was being directed by somebody in Ireland, somebody close to the scene of the incidents. Army investigators failed to dig up more than a few suspects who had easily proved their innocence.

The F.B.I. had been ordered on the job.

"We've got to start from scratch," the Director had explained to Murphy. "To fly a group of agents over there and plant them in the danger zones would be to make them stick out like a sore thumb. The better idea is to have an agent—you—be a buck private transferred to some ordnance outfit just before it sails for Ireland.

"That's already been arranged, and your papers are in order. You sail on the *Palomer* tomorrow night. Contact Captain George Parker—or, rather, he'll contact you. You've had enough military training to be able to get away with such things as the manual of arms."

The Director had almost smiled, despite the gravity of the moment.

"I don't want you to pose as any exemplary soldier, working for his stripes," he had continued. "I want you to be one of the world's worst soldiers. Not viciously bad, but—well, dumb. You try hard, but you do everything wrong. As a result, you're always on the carpet. You'll probably take some rough treatment from your non-coms, but the officers you'll be haled in front of—most of them, anyway—will know who you are. They'll identify themselves in the same way Captain Parker will."

He had rubbed a hand across his tired eyes as he leaned back in his chair.

"But I guess I don't have to tell you to be extremely cagey, Inspector, even with the officers whom you'll contact," he had wound up his instructions. "I hate to infer that one of our own uniformed officers might be mixed up in this but—well, I have to suspect everybody in a case like this. You'll have to work pretty much alone, and it's going to be a tough job. Your other instruc-

tions are all ready for you and on your desk."

The Director had stood up then and held out his hand.

"That's all," he had said, "and good luck. Go smoke out those rats, Inspector."

"I'll try, sir," Murphy had replied. "You'll be hearing from me."

Now, as the ship neared the North Irish coast, the G-man was ending his contact with G-2, Captain Parker. What little he had been able to learn on shipboard—and admittedly it was not a great deal—had been transmitted to Washington through the captain.

Who Frank Murphy's G-2 contact ashore would be he did not know, nor did Captain Parker. But, knowing the workings of Army Intelligence, Murphy was confident that the contact would be made.

The G-man in the private's uniform crushed out his cigarette and got out of his chair. He shook hands with Captain Parker and grinned.

"Yard Bird Murphy saying good-by, sir," he said, saluting.

HE MOVED toward the door, unlocked it and opened it a crack. Captain Parker raised his voice in an outraged bellow.

"And one more such inexcusable incident like this," shouted the captain, suddenly the most irate man on shipboard, "and I'll have you put on K.P. for life! I'll—I'll . . . Oh, get out of here!"

Private Murphy backed out of the captain's office, carefully forgetting to salute. There was another anguished cry from the officer within.

"Come back here!" roared Captain Parker.

"Sir?" asked Murphy.

"Weren't you ever taught to salute an officer when you left him?" The captain's bellow could be heard over half the ship. "Weren't you ever taught anything? Oh, great glory, why must every outfit that I'm detailed with have a man like you in the ranks!"

"Sorry, sir," said Murphy. He saluted.

The door banged shut, he turned to go down the corridor—and stopped short. Regarding him mournfully was the soldier who had stood beside him at the rail during the sub attack on the transport—Thornton. The man was leaning against a wall with that slouchy easiness that typified his every movement.

CHAPTER III

Clumsy Doughboy

PRIVATE THORNTON had come to the U. S. Army via some small town in Tennessee and the Selective Service. Always a melancholy man, he made no bones about the fact that he would rather be in Tennessee than aboard this ship, going to Ireland.

His own talk had focused the attention of G-2 and the F.B.I. on him, and yet there had never been any downright subversive talk. Private Thornton just didn't like the Army, he didn't like the ocean, he missed his grits and ham gravy, and he missed a "right pretty gal name of Cynthia."

He thought that saluting officers was a waste of precious effort. He was convinced that he could handle a squirrel rifle better than any Marine who ever wore a sharpshooter's medal. He hated M.P.s as his forebears doubtless had hated "revenooers," and he had spent considerable time in the guardhouse for demonstrating this dislike.

Yet for all his groaning talk, he made a good soldier. He wore a corporal's chevrons on his sleeve and the top sergeant, whom Thornton hated almost as much as he hated an M.P., had on several occasions given him grudging commendation publicly.

He was an anomaly to Murphy, experienced as the G-man was in making snap judgments of the characters of men. Frank Murphy had yet to decide whether Thornton was what he seemed, a soldier with a loose tongue and an habitual gripe, or a very, very clever person who masked something sinister beneath that gloomy exterior.

There had been things that Thornton had said . . . Were they slips of the tongue, or did they innocently carry a double meaning?

Now, the cocky little Irishman grinned at his companion at the rail.

"I just got it," he confided. "The captain is pretty sore."

"What did you do?" asked Thornton, with lackadaisical interest.

"Nuttin'. Nuttin' at all, s'help me! Sometimes I think they're down on me in this man's Army. Everything I do is wrong, seems like. Just because I said, 'Hi, sailor' to a guy, I get bawled out. How was I to know the guy was the captain of this here ship?"

Thornton sighed heavily and shook his head.

"I'll shore be glad to get off this ship and plant my feet on some dry land," he admitted. "From what I hear, we'll be gettin' in tonight, and I'm goin' to be the happiest boy that walks down that gangway, I'm tellin' you."

"Tonight!" Murphy said in astonishment. "You mean we're gettin' into Ireland tonight?"

"That's what I heard."

"Who told you?"

Thornton hunched his lean shoulders and began moving down the passageway.

"I forgit," he said over his shoulder. "Might be one of them bilge water rumors."

Private Francis Xavier Murphy stared after him thoughtfully.

"Now, I wonder," he asked himself silently. "I wonder just who gave you that information."

They disembarked at midnight, loaded down with full packs, helmeted, yowling "Roll Out the Barrel." The port into which the huge transport had put was an unprepossessing place. Rain was falling and the few lights on the quay cast only a dim glow over the proceedings.

"So this is the Emerald Isle," piped a voice in the darkness. "I'll take Terre Haute."

"Pipe down!" growled a sergeant. "And pick up those big feet of yours. What did you expect—a velvet carpet and the mayor out to shake hands with you?"

PRIVATE FRANCIS XAVIER MURPHY, loaded with his pack and the gun that always seemed to be at the wrong angle, to the dismay of the men in front and in back of him, scrambled down the gangplank. He made the dock all right, but he had taken only two or three steps when something tripped him —a foot?—and he went sprawling.

There was a clatter of equipment as he landed hard, and the pack he never had quite learned how to stow, disintegrated. Murphy lay for a second on the wet planking, thinking fast.

"So it comes this quick, eh?" he asked himself, grinning into the darkness.

He looked up to see a pair of cordovan boots standing over him.

"Gimme a hand, pal," he said. "That yappin' sergeant will have my ears for this."

The cordovan boots did not move so Murphy, grasping one boot by the ankle, used it as a hand-hold to haul himself erect. He looked up to see one of the angriest colonels he ever had met.

The man glared at him for a second, speechless, then burst into a halloo that brought half a dozen under officers running. The colonel pointed at Murphy with a stabbing finger and fought to get his voice.

"That—that man!" he cried. "Of all the bungling, insubordinate . . . Place him under arrest!"

Two burly M.P.s loomed out of the misty rain and descended upon Murphy, figuratively licking their lips. They had met Francis Xavier before.

"Jeeps, Captain," Murphy blurted. "I didn't mean nothin'. Somebody tripped me!"

"A-h-h," said the colonel. "So it's captain, eh? Don't you know your insignias? Don't you know anything?"

"Don't you know anything?"

"That's it," Murphy told himself. "They're not wasting any time around here."

"Don't you know anything" had been the more or less password that the Director had given Frank Murphy before he had left Washington. It might be hurled at soldiers a hundred times a day by non-coms and by officers, but there was only one answer that would complete the mutual identification.

"My Uncle Pat always said I didn't," Murphy said feebly.

The colonel seemed to swell.

"Impudence—more insubordination! Take this man away!"

The junior officers crowded around the colonel, making soothing clucking noises as the M.P.s fastened iron grips on Murphy's arms. One of them, a burly six-foot-sixer who looked as though he had spent most of his life in the wres-

tling racket, opened one corner of his mouth to say, with replete satisfaction:

"You'll get life for this, Yard Bird. That guy is tops at our cantonment."

"I didn't mean nothin'," Murphy protested. "A guy can slip and fall, can't he?"

"Sure, but he can't pull himself up on a colonel's leg," said the M.P.

"How'd I know he was a colonel?"

"I ain't seen any privates wearin' boots lately," was the M.P.'s clipped retort.

THE makeshift guardhouse once had been the seaport town's jail. It was cold, it was wet, and it was moldy. Inspector Murphy of the F.B.I. lighted a cigarette and sat down on a damp bench to await the visit that he knew was going to come. He was there for perhaps two hours before keys rattled in the lock and the door was swung open.

"C'mon, you," said a hoarse-voiced M.P. "And if you have prayers to say, prepare to say them now. Colonel Knowles himself, wants to see you. It's probably a firing squad or, at least, twenty years in Leavenworth."

The husky M.P. said that with particular relish. He, too, had met Private Francis Xavier Murphy during the trip across the Atlantic. Anyone who had not seen Murphy in action might have wondered how one rather insignificant man could have antagonized so many big M.P.s in such a brief voyage. But Murphy, playing his rôle, had proved himself adept.

He passed through a succession of clerks, secretaries and orderlies. Finally he was ushered into the office of Colonel Knowles. A major and several assorted captains were in the office when Murphy arrived. This time, Inspector Murphy saluted, a gesture that surprised the M.P. guard who had reason to believe that Francis Xavier never saluted an officer if he possibly could forget to.

"Har-rumph," puffed Colonel Knowles. "All right, gentlemen, I believe that's all. I've got to talk to this soldier and, because of dignity of rank, I'd rather do it alone, so I can let off steam. That will be all, and thank you."

The officers filed out, each one casting a curious glance at the forlorn private who stood near the door in an M.P.'s grasp, for all the world like a hookey player in a truant officer's clutch.

"You may go, Guard," said Colonel Knowles, as he shuffled some papers on his desk. "Wait outside, please."

The M.P. saluted briskly, wheeled and left the room. Expertly, Private Murphy slipped over and turned the lock on the office door.

Again there was that magical change in the private's demeanor. The colonel also shucked the thunder-and-lightning expression he had worn. He bent and unlocked a small dispatch case that he took from a drawer. When he spoke, it was swiftly and in an undertone.

"Haven't much time, Inspector," he said. "You'll get guardhouse, of course, for a couple of days. But it was thought best to work that way. Certain reasons. In the guardhouse we have a man who got tight in a pub at Londonderry. We're holding him on simple D and D charges, but we think there's more to it than that.

"This man—his name's O'Toole—is a rabid anti-Britisher. Seems some of his folks were executed by the British during the Black and Tan Rebellion, or up-

[*Turn page*]

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(Adv.)

rising or whatever you want to call it. O'Toole is in an ordnance company and he has been in the general neighborhood of all the incidents that have occurred.

"Might be coincidence—or it might be something else. This pub where he was picked up is under surveillance, but we haven't been able to get a thing. Work on him, and you might get a lead.

"Briefly, we suspect the tavern keeper, a barmaid by the name of Noreen something. And one of the civilians who makes trips that might land him in Dublin and contact with the Axis agents who are making that city sort of a clearing place.

"Of course, you know that Eire's neutral—and my family were County Limerick people! Imagine them not getting into this fight! But I digress. Here is what we know and suspect, and you'll find that what we know is a drop in the bucket, against what we suspect.

"That old jail we're using for a guardhouse has its advantages, because you'll have a separate cell. You'll be able to read our reports without having anybody look over your shoulder. Perhaps you've got some questions?"

Frank Murphy considered carefully.

"Any recent incidents you have in mind?" he asked.

"One. A small one, relatively speaking. There was a fire this afternoon in a garage where some jeeps were stored. Not much damage and—thank God—the extinguishers were not filled with high octane gas."

"How about the I.R.A.?" asked Murphy.

The colonel wrinkled his brow.

"The Irish Republican Army?" he asked, returning a question with a question in true Yankee fashion. "It might be that they've sent some men over the line to bedevil us. But the Irish—North or South—have no grudge against the United States. Great glory, man! Read the roster of your police departments and they'll show you that if an I.R.A. man did anything that might endanger the life of an American soldier, he might be aiming the bomb or whatever at his own cousin, the son of Denny who's a cop in America.

"No, I can't swallow the theory that the Sein Fein or whatever is mixed up with this. Our country is too close to Eire to have that happen."

CHAPTER IV

Début in the Emerald Isle

SECRETLY, Murphy was in accord with the colonel's theory. But in his mind it still stood to reason that some of the I.R.A., in their inborn hatred of all things British, might forget Uncle Denny, the cop, in a chance to strike a blow at Britain. And, at the time, the American troops in Ulster generally were accepted as a force destined to help the British repel an invasion.

Patriotism was one of the finest things in the world. But when it was corrupted by fanaticism, it lost its glorious qualities and became an insane thing that struck without looking or thinking.

So there was that poser. If the I.R.A. were sending agents into American camps in Ulster, to strike at Britain through the United States troops, Frank Murphy knew his job was going to be harder than he had imagined it.

It was no secret that all through Ulster Ireland were scattered Free State sympathizers who fought the Ulster rule at every turn. They looked, talked, acted, dressed exactly like the most loyal—to Britain—Irishmen who ever walked the streets. To try to separate the sheep from the goats would be a job that would have made Samson shudder.

But the F.B.I. is made up of men by whom Herculean tasks are taken in stride. Murphy nodded his head and said quietly:

"It's still a point to be considered. I'll take the reports and you can have the M.P. called to throw me in the hoosegow."

He smiled and added casually:

"How my old father would love to hear this. My first night on the Ould Sod and I'm spending it in jail. He'd have been proud of me, I think, because he always said that no man worth his salt could grow up without being able to say that he'd spent at least a day and a night in jail, bad cess to the constables."

The colonel grinned sympathetically.

"My father," he said, "was of the same opinion. Ready to go?"

"I think so . . . Oh, one thing. Did you hear from Captain Parker?"

"I have his report. We're watching the man named Thornton. You think there might be a connection?"

Murphy shrugged.

"Hard to say," he acknowledged. "He might be linked up with the goings-on around here, he might be a separate agent, he might be entirely innocent and merely a thoughtless talker. Anyway, it probably would be best to have an eye on him."

He was led back to the guardhouse, with its walls of stone that must have been quarried in the time of Mael-Sechnaill, dripping moisture. He stared at the iron-barred windows that might have been fashioned in the age of Ruaidri Ua Conchubair. And he felt dismal, far removed from the swift, hot action to which he had become accustomed during his years with the F.B.I.

He waited there, smoking the cigarettes he had accepted from the colonel, until a voice from an adjoining cell spoke.

"And what are ye in here for?" asked the voice.

Frank left the bench and walked to the grilled door.

"Who's talkin'?" he asked in his best West Side accent. "And ain't this one heck of a place for a N'york boy?"

"You'll see worse, before you're through," the man in the next cell said. "M'name's O'Toole, and what's yours?"

"Murphy," said the F.B.I. inspector. "What're you in for?"

"And what's your outfit?" asked O'Toole, without answering the G-man's question.

Murphy gave the name of the outfit to which he had been assigned.

"And yours?" he asked, in return.

O'TOOLE named another ordnance outfit, one of the first to have arrived in Ireland after the troop movements began.

"What kind of a place is this?" Murphy asked eagerly. "Lotsa dames and Irish whiskey, huh?"

O'Toole grunted.

"You'll see," he told Murphy. "That is, if they ever let you out of here. I heard you took off the colonel's boots, or something like that."

"Naw," Murphy said modestly. "I just grabbed his feet when I slipped and fell. And for that, I get this."

"You did fine, boy." There was just a trace of "bhoy" in that last word. "For that, ye'll get plenty of work battalion or K.P. But I'll be with ye. I've got a record as black as the heart of the worst Black and Tan."

"Any chance of crashin' out of this joint?" asked Murphy.

"You mean breakin' out of here? God love ye, m'bhoy, but ye wouldn't get ten feet before some M.P. was playin' a drum solo on your skull with his club."

"How long have you been in?"

"A couple of days. I had a glass too many at the Cock and Elk, and some Nosy Parker of an M.P. grabbed me. All I was doing was tellin' the bhoys a little about the Rebellion, and maybe I said somethin' a little uncomplimentary to the foine gentlemen who hanged James Connolly. Maybe I said a couple of harsh words about the British of that day. Not that I'm not as good a United Nations man now as the President himself, God bless him."

Murphy considered. Again he was confronted by the doubt of whether the man in the next cell, the O'Toole whom the colonel said was being suspected, was a loose-jawed fellow who meant no harm but talked too much, or whether he actually was a sinister character who hid his menace under the babble of a rattling tongue.

"This Cock and Elk," he said, carefully. "What is that—a saloon?"

"They call 'em pubs over here, and it is. A foine place, where a man on leave can enjoy himself, if he likes warm beer. They never ice it over here and it takes some time to get accustomed to that. But I found it easy, so to speak.

"I'm quick to adapt meself to foreign ways, though Ireland shouldn't be foreign to me, with this brogue I wear on me tongue. And my sainted mother refusin' to speak English and talkin' in Gaelic to the end, on account of what happened to her brother when he was ambush-caded by the"—he threw in some uncensored words—"Black and Tans at Rathcormack."

"My old man came from Sligo," Murphy said. "He thought the same thing about them Black and Tans."

O'Toole's voice grew lower, confidential.

"Maybe you're gettin' a dirty deal out of this, too, eh? I mean, landing in the jug on your first night ashore, while all your mates are havin' the time of their lives at the Cock and Elk."

"They been pickin' on me," Murphy admitted drearily.

"Maybe you'd like to get back at them?"

"I . . . How?"

"Never mind," O'Toole said mysteriously. "There might come a chance, if you keep your eyes open."

LATER that night, when the lights had been extinguished except for a dim bulb at the far end of the ancient gaol's corridor, Inspector Murphy reclined on the hard wooden bunk and thought over the impressions he had got from his brief talk with O'Toole. Certainly, the man had been inoculated with a hatred for the British soldiers of fortune who had made up that army which Great Britain herself later had labeled disgraceful.

But, Murphy mused, the Black and Tans might not have been entirely to blame for their own dark record. Returning from a world where the only commandment had been "Kill or be killed," they had found that there were no jobs for them, no food for them unless they purchased that food with the wages they could not earn.

They had fought for civilization, and now this thing they had fought for was treating them like members of an unwanted mob that had straggled back out of limbo. They had come back to a place they had thought would receive them like heroes, but which gave them a brusqueness little short of contempt.

Little wonder, then, that these men who might have been counting-house clerks or tram attendants in other years, volunteered for service in the "Anglo-Irish War" of 1919. They were given guns and they knew how to use them. If they killed needlessly and burned and terrorized, it may have been because the horror of war from which they had just emerged still festered in their brains.

With great efficiency, they had been taught to kill, and when their killing services had ended, temporarily, they had been treated as pariahs, forgotten men. Now, they could earn money by killing again, and they did. And they brought the enduring hatred of South Ireland and all its people down on Britain by the things they did.

Murphy shrugged it off. It was not his job to ponder the intricacies of international politics, to weigh the pros and cons of the "Anglo-Irish War." It was his job, his duty, to find out who was behind the wave of sabotage that was sweeping over this particular ordnance cantonment in Ulster Ireland and bring the guilty one to a certain, swift justice.

The Irish wars would be fought over again wherever two Irishmen gathered over a glass of beer. And the day an agreement was reached, Murphy told himself, the stone lions in front of the Public Library on Fifth Avenue, New York, would roar aloud.

He talked more with O'Toole in the days that followed, but he learned little beyond developing a massive store of information about the history of Ireland, from the days of the Connacht kings up to Eamon de Valera. This information, he reflected, certainly would come in handy if he ever felt tempted to write a history of the Emerald Isle. But it served little purpose for helping in a solution of the case at hand.

One thing impressed him, however. The Cock and Elk was prominently mentioned by O'Toole on frequent occasions. From the veiled statements of the man in the adjoining cell, Murphy got the impression that the pub, snuggled close to the high wire fence that enclosed the cantonment, held some mystery that O'Toole kept secret in a satisfied silence.

"Private" Francis Xavier Murphy resolved to make the pub his first port of call when he was released from durance vile.

THIS release came after three days' incarceration. Through devious channels, the G-man asked for a pass and, to his top sergeant's obvious disgust, the pass was immediately forthcoming.

"I don't know how you rate it," that worthy said, shaking his head sadly. "If I had anything to do with it, you wouldn't get a pass until you were loaded on a transport goin' to Berlin. But here's your pass, all signed and everything. And, Murphy, for the love

of Mike, don't get in any more trouble. They'll be havin' my stripes next, because I can't keep you in line better."

"I'll behave, Sarge," Murphy promised earnestly. "You wait and see. And I'm sorry about grabbin' the captain's leg, that way."

"Colonel, you idiot! How many times . . . Arrrgh, get goin' before I forget myself and strike an enlisted man of lower rank, which is forbidden although I never could see why. Scram!"

Murphy scrammed.

His shoes polished to mirrorlike brilliance and his uniform natty in comparison to his usual appearance, he hied his way to the Cock and Elk.

CHAPTER V

Meeting Place

THE Cock and Elk was a small place, jammed with American soldiers. There was the familiar cloud of tobacco smoke, the rumble of cross conversations that mark a saloon in any part of the world where Yanks gather. With difficulty, the G-man pushed his way up to the bar.

Standing at the long-handled beer taps was one of the prettiest girls he ever had seen. Her black hair was tumbled in tight curls about her head. Her eyes were blue and laughing, and her cheeks were touched with a color that no cosmetic expert ever could devise.

As Murphy leaned against the bar, she deftly filled four brimming mugs of foaming liquid and slid them down the bar toward the waiting customers with an ease that would have brought envy to a Tenth Avenue bartender. She looked at Murphy, smiling. The bogus private saw that her teeth were as perfect as her complexion.

"And what'll it be, sir?" she asked.

Later, Murphy tried to duplicate her accent and found it a hopeless task. For anyone even to have attempted to spell it in a written account would have been impossible.

"A beer," he said. "You must be Noreen."

She bobbed her head in acknowledgement as she moved toward the beer tap. Murphy gazed at her in frank admiration as she filled the mug and slid it toward him.

He brought out a handful of British coins and proffered the small mound to the barmaid.

"You count it out," he suggested. "Me, I'm new to this kind of money."

The girl laughed and picked out a couple of enormous copper coins.

"This'll do it," she said. "You're new at the camp, eh?"

"I been here a couple of days," Frank Murphy said, "but this is the first time I got out."

"He means he's been in the guardhouse since we docked," said a mournful voice at Murphy's elbow.

The G-man turned to find Thornton standing beside him. The Southerner looked as forlorn as ever, but for the first time, Murphy realized the man's eyes were—what was the word?—calculating.

Behind that sleepy exterior lay—what?

"Mr. Thornton," said the barmaid, "has been telling me about the cowboys and Indians in Tennessee. It must be frightful to have to carry a—what is it?—long rifle when you go to mass. But I would like to live where you kill stags from the back entry of your cottage every morning."

Murphy cast an inquiring glance at Thornton. The Tennessean stared back at him blandly.

"Yeah," said Murphy, "but you ought to live where I lived. We got Indians there that make Thornton's look like sissies. Why, one day, when I was gettin' off the El, there come four big chiefs with feathers and everything and they come at me and—"

He never finished the story about the four big chiefs who "ambush-caded" him as he got off the El. For piercing the fog of smoke and talk in that little pub came the wail of sirens from the camp.

"Jerry," said the pretty barmaid with complete calm. "Been expecting him for some time."

An M.P. who had been keeping a lonely vigil outside the door of the pub entered, flushed with the pleasure of his chance to exercise his authority.

"You ack-ack guys scram back," he said. "The rest of you stay here. Get

into the shelter, and if they hit this joint you can die happy, knowin' that your best friend—booze—was with you when you cashed in your chips. Aw-right, get goin'."

A DOZEN or so men dashed out of the door, bound for their anti-aircraft posts. The others milled uncertainly, until a booming Irish voice ordered:

"Trap-door behind the bar, gints, and a shelter that would take a block-buster to even get a dent. And a round on the house in honor of the occasion."

Noreen, the barmaid, quickly lifted a trap-door set behind the bar and the men began to form a line to file down the steep steps. Murphy lingered behind, regarding the owner of that booming voice.

He was, obviously, the owner of the Cock and Elk, and he was a giant of a man. In other years, he must have been something of an athlete, but sedentary living, a gargantuan appetite and a love for the goods he sold had padded his massive frame with fat. His face was bright red and split by a grin, and there was a graying thatch of red hair atop his round head.

Outside, the first yapping bursts of the anti-aircraft guns could be heard and the G-man could just make out the thin whine of high-flying motors. Then, just before he reached the edge of the stairway well, there came a series of dull thumps.

"They're wide, as usual," remarked the tavern keeper cheerily. "Rotten bombers, thim Jerries. Down y'go."

Murphy descended to a room which, at one time, might have been a wine cellar. It was jam-packed with men, far too many for them all to find seats on the benches that had been placed around the walls.

There was a radio in the center of the room. The fat man went to it and twisted a switch that brought life to the instrument. None of them saw the section of the brick wall swing open and a man in Yank uniform slip through.

"A bit of wireless will help us pass the time," the landlord said. "You've nothin' to fear, lads. The Jerries, they've been over before, but they never hit what they're aimin' at."

He kept on talking through the thin stream of music that emerged from the radio. And that was all right with the soldiers in the shelter. Their experience with BBC music and humor had made them cynical of the entertainment possibilities of the London "wireless."

"Most times," said mine host, "they dump their bombs south of the camp, because they're fooled by the camouflage to the north. A pretty piece of camouflage, I must say, who served my four full years with the Nineteenth Guards durin' the last go. The way you Americans have prettied up that parcel of ground where the old coursing place used to be made my eyes pop. Noreen, girl, see that the gentlemen are served."

The girl started for the big oak cask that sat at one end of the room. She was halfway to the tap when there was an air-splitting roar, a jarring concussion that shook everyone in the shelter.

A haze of whitewash dust sifted down from the ceiling. Murphy could hear the tavern keeper roaring, almost unintelligibly. Almost, that is, but Frank Murphy caught some words.

The proprietor of the Cock and Elk lifted his fist toward the roof of the shelter.

"Bad cess to thim!" he cried, when his voice could be heard. "Ye kin hear thim bottles upstairs rattlin' like a skiliton's bones in a haunted house. Ah, 'tis ruinous to be a tavern keeper whin the blasted Jerries drop their bombs on an innocent pub, a half a mile east of what they're tryin' to hit!"

MURPHY looked about the room. More jarring thuds shook the place and the men in the shelter could hear the patter of ack-ack fragments landing close by.

Noreen, evidently an old hand at bombing raids, drew beer from the tap of the great barrel and distributed the mugs. The concussion had made the beer too foamy, but Murphy drank gratefully, plunging his face into the white moisture, while his brain raced along, quite independently.

"My name's not Timmins," the landlord was bellowing, "if I don't wish I was young enough to get back in the Army and pay thim back for what they do to me! I envy you boys with your foine anti-tank guns that have their own engines to carry them places! And the foine Mustangs ye unloaded when

ye got here. In our day we had guns that look like pea-shooters as against yours."

He kept on, enumerating the advantages of modern-day materiel as compared with that of World War I. His harangue was liberally sprinkled with invectives directed against Germany, Italy and Japan—although he was a bit vague about just where Japan was. He kept on and on until the "All Clear" sounded.

The soldiers trooped back upstairs to find the windows of the pub blown inward by the concussion of the bomb that had landed a couple of hundred yards away. They picked their way over broken glass to the doorway and out into the road.

Across the fields rose a pillar of black smoke that marked the place where one German bomber had met its end. With a whoop, the soldiers began a dash for the burning bomber.

Private Francis Xavier Murphy stayed behind.

He helped Noreen and Timmins clean up the shattered glass and put to rights the chairs and tables that had been upended by the explosion. That done, he allowed himself to be treated by the huge tavern keeper to a "pint of the bitter".

He was swallowing his drink when Thornton lounged up to the bar.

"How come you didn't go see the Kraut plane?" he asked.

"I was thirsty," Murphy explained. "I been in the guardhouse on water for too long. I figured I'd see the plane later."

"It was a Dornier," Thornton said. "Shot to smithereens. I hear they made a couple of direct hits, though, at the camp. We'd better get back and see if they got our barracks. I'd shore hate to find out that Swanson's pin-up pictures got bombed."

"You bet," said Murphy. "If they got a direct hit on that black-haired doll in the neglijay, I'm gonna have me a one-man invasion."

They left the pub and had started up the road when Murphy suddenly slapped his pockets.

"I forgot me wallet," he said. "I must've left it on the bar, back there. Only be a minute."

He returned to the pub—and the man he saw near the doorway was his erstwhile guardhouse companion, O'Toole. The soldier was brushing at his uniform as he stood at the bar. He glanced up with a grin of recognition as Murphy entered.

"I see ye found the place," he told Frank Murphy. "One of the best in Ireland, like I told ye, eh?"

Murphy's eyes narrowed and he spoke slowly.

"How did you get in here?" he asked. "I was here till a couple of minutes ago and you wasn't here. You didn't pass us on the road to camp and—"

O'TOOLE grinned widely.

"And I'd hardly be gettin' a pass this quick after bein' in the guardhouse, eh?" he asked.

He lowered his voice to a confidential level.

"I told you there was a way to get back at the M.P.s and the others that pick on us, didn't I? Well, me, I get back at thim by makin' monkeys out of thim. They don't know there's a way I can always get to the Cock and Elk without goin' through the gates and passin' the guards. They think they've got a lock on me and—"

"Dinny, bhoy," cautioned Timmins, behind the bar, "it's a loose tongue ye're carryin' and one that might get ye into trouble."

O'Toole waved a hand with negligent contempt at the landlord's suspicion.

"This bhoy's all right." He grinned. "Like me, he's spint most of his time in the guardhouse because M.P.s and ninety-day wonders of officers ain't to his likin'. Murphy, you're elected to the lodge. The lodge of men that don't like stayin' in camp whin there's good beer to be had a little piece away. And if a man can drop down into a tunnel, a hole in the ground, and come out under the fence, into Timmins' air-raid shelter, who's to blame him for bein' a bit of a mole in the ground?"

"Dinny!" barked the huge landlord. "Ye'll have every M.P. around here knowin' our little secret, with your clatterin' tongue."

O'Toole laughed easily.

"Niver fear," he said. "This bhoy's father was a Sligo man, and there niver was a Sligo man nor his son or his son's son who'd turn in another Irishman.

Y'see, Murphy, there used to be a bit of cheatin' the King's customs wardens around here, and this old inn was a sort of headquarters, y'might say. They used to bring the stuff here through a tunnel that ran from Lough Foyle clear to here.

"Most of the tunnel's fallen in, but there's enough of it left to make a little underground avenue from a place back of the mess shack to Timmons' air-raid shelter. I'll show it to ye."

CHAPTER VI

UNCOVERED

LANDLORD TIMMINS' eyes were small and red as he stared at Private Francis Xavier Murphy.

"And now," he said heavily, "I call you bound to a promise not to make trouble for me, bhoy. As one Irishman to another, I call for that promise."

Murphy shook his head.

"I ain't makin' no promises," he said, "until I know you're an Irishman. And I don't think you are."

"*What?*"

"Nope," said Murphy obstinately. "I don't think you're any more an Irishman than Mussolini is."

"Curse ye, I'll choke ye on those words!" cried Timmins, shaking his head like a goaded bull.

"And I'll tell you why," continued Murphy, calmly. "Down there in the cellar, while you were sounding off, you let slip with a word no Irishman would ever use. The Jerries who bombed you were *verdammt Dumkopfs*, because they were bombing the very place that was giving them their directions."

"Ye're daft, man!"

"Yeah? That bit with the radio was clever, but not too hard to figure out. I've seen walkie-talkies work before, but I've never seen them used in an air-raid shelter, where the genial landlord goes on and on about how the Jerries always miss their targets because they're too far south, and how the camouflage to the north is so clever. Whereupon the bombers shift northward.

"Nor have I ever seen one used to enumerate the kinds of equipment that have just arrived—anti-tank guns, Mustangs, and so on. What you said must have had some coded words, too, so the Nazis could find out how many of everything we had unloaded. That tunnel of yours must come in handy for sneaking your men into camp to make check-ups—in American uniforms, of course."

"Wait a minute," O'Toole said. "You mean this thing is a spy?"

Murphy nodded.

"It's pretty certain," he said. "I can't understand how he let you in on the secret of the tunnel—unless you're in with him."

O'Toole turned and deliberately spat on the floor.

"In with a spy?" he asked. "Man, what do you think I am? I found the tunnel entrance by accident, when I was cleanin' up the yard as penance for my sins. I slipped away, later, and followed it here. And this—this animal made it a big joke that it was our secret, because I could always get out and drop in for a quick one.

"And," said Murphy, "Timmins—as he calls himself—could always get into camp for his sabotage and espionage the same way. You couldn't dream of a fine Irishman doing anything like that. But he's no Irishman. He's a Heinie, O'Toole, as German as Fatso Goering."

O'Toole groaned.

"And to think I let him get away with it!" he said. "The murderin'—"

Murphy's hand flashed inside his tunic and came up with a heavy service automatic with miraculous speed. The fat man, who had made a dive for something just under the bar, stopped short and slowly raised his big hands.

"Out from behind there," ordered Murphy in a clipped voice. "And I'll take the gun you've got hidden there."

HE BEGAN edging warily around the big tavern keeper as "Timmins" slid out from behind the bar. Lying on a shelf under the counter was a murderous looking Luger. Murphy was reaching for it when something drilled into his spine.

"And now," said Noreen, the barmaid, in a grating voice, "you can put up your own hands."

It was Murphy's turn to groan. He had entirely overlooked the presence of the sweet-faced girl, Noreen. But he

realized, as he cursed his oversight, that the fat man hardly could have kept anybody but a confederate in the Cock and Elk. And Murphy had turned his back on that confederate.

"It serves me right," he said. "Too trusting of a pretty face."

His gun was plucked from his grasp by the fat man who had lumbered back to his side. In a flash, the long-barreled Luger stared at him with its round, evil eye.

"So," said "Timmins," and his thickly buttered Irish accent vanished miraculously. "You have been very clever, detective. Too clever, I'm afraid. And you, O'Toole, have learned too much. While you were just a troublesome Irishman with a thirst and a penchant for reciting an amazingly boring history of Ireland, you were harmless. It was better to let you use the tunnel for your juvenile escapades, once you had discovered it, than to liquidate you and perhaps start an investigation. But now you, and the other Yankee must be liquidated. Surely, you can understand why."

O'Toole's face was white, with the freckles standing out like red-ink drops on snow.

"You can't get away with it!" he cried hoarsely. "How do you think you can hide our bodies, even if you're mad enough to kill us?"

"Hide them?" asked the fat man with mild amusement. "Who would hide them. No, you'll be found—what's left of you. Unfortunately, a delayed action bomb will destroy this place, and you two in it. Noreen and I will have discovered the bomb and you two will have volunteered to remove it, despite our protests.

"Doubtless, both of you had a glass too many. We will have run outside, to summon M.P.s to dissuade you from your foolhardy task, but we will have been too late. Regrettable, *nein?*"

O'Toole cursed heavily, and the fat man smiled.

"Noreen," he called, "please keep these two fools covered in the back room, while I fix the—er—delayed action bomb."

The girl came up behind Murphy and O'Toole with a replica of the fat man's gun in her slim white hand. She still was beautiful, Murphy noticed, but in a hard, vampirish way. Her blue eyes gleamed with an unholy hate and her lips that had been curved in a smile, were a thin, bloodless line.

"Noreen!" O'Toole groaned. "Don't tell me you're another one of these devils?"

THE girl spoke from between clenched teeth.

"*Fraulein* Hedwig Kaussermann," she informed the two prisoners. "The name Noreen nauseated me. A foolish name as all things Irish are foolish. Dolts! Stupid ones! All of us must do what we are ordered to serve *der Fuehrer,* but I hope my next assignment is an easier one than to have to listen to clumsy Irish lovemaking in a vile-smelling café. But into the back room with you!"

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MURPHY followed O'Toole into a small back room, cluttered with empty bottles and the other litter of a saloon. The girl stood by the door, her gun unwavering. Murphy could hear the fat man who had masqueraded under the name of Timmins puffing and panting as he worked in the main barroom.

"It looks," said Murphy casually, "as though we're in a jam."

"I did it," O'Toole said dismally. "If I hadn't sounded off about the tunnel, this wouldn't have happened."

"It was a bit premature," Murphy admitted. "But I should have thought of the girl. That was inexcusable on my part."

"We could rush them," O'Toole said hopefully.

"Not a chance. *Fraulein* Kaussermann wouldn't let us get two feet. Would you, *gnadige Fraulein?*"

"Not one foot," spat the girl venomously.

She broke off as the fat man entered the back room, beaming with satisfaction.

"Now," he announced, "I tie you up. After the explosion there will not be enough left of you to tell whether you were bound or not. So—"

He worked with incredible speed and deftness, for all his bulk. As he lashed Murphy's wrists and ankles, O'Toole made a sudden leap at the fat man. There was the crack of a gun and the Irishman yelped in pain as a slug tore into his shoulder. He fell back, clutching the wound and cursing.

Murphy waited. If there had been the slightest chance, he would have risked grappling with Timmins, or even Noreen. But he knew that, even before he was bound, to have done that would have meant instant death—and a dead G-man would be of no earthly use to anybody.

And there was still a faint ray of hope—the mournful Thornton. Some time had passed since Murphy had left the Southerner on the road to go back for the wallet he had planted on the bar. Perhaps Thornton had gone on to camp. Or perhaps—

"You might get some consolation from the fact that it will be quick," said the fat man, after he had trussed up O'Toole. "One second—boom—and it will be all over. The Gestapo could have made it much more unpleasant. I could, myself, but there isn't time."

He went out the door after the girl and Murphy could hear the scrape of a match being struck. There was a spluttering noise and the big man reappeared.

"Two minutes," he said. "That is the time the fuse has been set for. So, for the next hundred and twenty seconds, you can reflect on the idiocy of trying to balk the New Order."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," remarked a mild voice from behind the big man.

"Timmins" spun, his gun ready. There, a few feet behind the fat man stood Corporal Thornton, a squat automatic in his hand.

The fat man fired once, blindly, before there was a one-two crash of shots from Thornton's gun. The saboteur raised a hand to his face, clutched at the crimson mass that had been one eye, and toppled. The tavern shook as his bulk smashed to the floor.

Fraulein Hedwig Kaussermann raised her own gun.

"I wouldn't," Thornton said quietly.

SLOWLY the girl's hand dropped. The gun fell from nerveless fingers. Behind Thornton, Murphy could see the big frames of half a dozen M.P.s.

Casually Thornton retrieved the girl's gun, then stepped over to stamp out the fuse of the bomb "Timmins" had planted. The M.P.s took "Noreen" out, bound for some mysterious destination. O'Toole and Murphy were freed from their bonds. . . .

"I was pretty stupid," Murphy admitted later. "I caught the two-way radio stunt and I had Timmins pegged, and still I went back there and let the girl grab me. Of course, I didn't expect to run into O'Toole with his story that blew the cork out of the bottle."

Thornton grinned.

"Except for the unpleasant minutes you spent in there, it was the best thing that could have happened. That little spill-fest the German and the girl indulged in cleared up a lot of angles. And the Heinie's grab for his gun gave me an excuse to finish his career."

"But—well, I admit I had you down as a suspect," Frank Murphy said.

"That makes us even. I had you down

for one, too. As a matter of fact, you were Suspect Number One in my book."

He laughed suddenly.

"One thing you've got to hand the Director," he said. "He double-checks on everything. They never told me there was another agent aboard that ship, and they didn't tell you. I was trying to pump you, while you were trying to pump me, and we both got suspicious of the other. Captain Parker, I imagine, got a big kick out of it. First you, and then I, would run in with our reports. He must have known, of course, but he couldn't crack. Must have handed him a laugh."

"Yeah," said Murphy ruefully. "I must have cut a pretty comic figure."

The other agent's hand dealt him a resounding slap on the shoulder.

"You did some swell work," he said. "You got O'Toole to talk, and he'd never have spilled a word to anybody wearing stripes—not even a corporal's."

He grinned, his mouth quirking.

"And I must admit," he added, "that I never saw a more convincing yard bird in my life."

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Dillingby threw a waste basket and Willie fled for his life

WILLIAM KLUMP, NURSEMAID

By JOE ARCHIBALD

The Hawkeye Hawkshaw plays "wooden duck" for a killer and gets a clue from Mother Goose!

GERTRUDE MUDGETT read the gossip columns as regularly as bangtail fever patients peruse the racing forms.

"It makes a girl sophisticated," she told William Klump, president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, one evening when they were having their mess in La Boheme Rouge on East Forty-sixth Street.

"When you are with people you can converse in step with them and they won't take you for no dope."

"That reminds me, I must buy that latest issue of All Laugh Comics before I go home t'night," Willie said.

"Now right here is somethin' that is a riot in Hinchell's column," Gertie pointed out. "Stop playin' Begin the Beguine with your soup and listen, Willie. 'During your correspondent's nightly canvas of the big town's best

bistros, he observed a strange coincidence. Sherman Dillingby, boniface of El Bonanza, greeted us at the sacred portals of the Puce Room wearing as pretty a mouse under his right glimmer as you'd ever want to see.

" 'Sherman also had a knot on his almost hairless pate and there was a cut under his lower lip. He claimed the dim-outs were getting serious and said he fell down cellar going after some grape. . . . Imagine our astonishment when we minced into La Maison de Boeuf and beheld the host, Rinaldo Lavista, wearing a pair of black cheaters and packing a chunk of adhesive tape on the bridge of his nose. . . .

" 'Last but not least, as we paid our respects to Toots Short of the Club 23, we noticed that Toots' ordinarily handsome pan had been scrambled a trifle and Toots looked like a grunt and groan performer after a tiff on the canvas. . . .' "

"Dolls," Willie said and sniffed. "Them big-shots are always gittin' sued or clawed up by one. Maybe they was all competin' for the services of a new warbler and had t' fight it out to sign her up. Anyways, they have lots of enemies, as look how many citizens they rob in those joints!"

JUST the same," Gertie said. "It is coincidents like Hinchell says. Use your napkin, sloppy. You got nine points' worth of fodder on your chin now. What I see in you—"

"Well, I just put five hun'red in the bank the F.B.I. give me, so—"

"Oh, I'm an adventurist, am I? A golddigger!" Gertie said in piercing tones. "Why, you got a nerve, William Klump. I want you to understand I passed up a dozen men to get at you. I won't sit here an' let you insult me. I—"

"Please, Madam," a little waitress said, leaning over Gertie. She thought Gertie was complaining about the food. "Don't blame me as the manager told me to—"

"You go tell him to peel a turnip," Gertie yelped back and picked up her war-bag. "Tell him the food here is terrible."

"He knows it," the doll with the apron said, and Willie laughed. Gertie got up and walked out of the restaurant and yelled back to Willie from the sidewalk. The waitress turned to Willie. "I feel sorry for you when you git home, Mister. How long you been married?"

"We are just engaged," Willie gulped.

"Oh, brother!"

"I was thinkin' that too, sister," Willie said. "I am goin' to my draft board tomorrer and ask them to make sure I wouldn't be a good risk in Sicily or somewhere."

He got up and paid his tariff and when he came outside he gave a subway kiosk a wide berth, as it was a natural booby trap and Gertie had thrown things before.

Willie thought a good walk would do him good and his peregrinations finally took him to the corner of Madison and Fifty-seventh where he leaned against a store front to ponder the vicissitudes of his profession. Willie was a private investigator like some famous characters of fiction and radio but there the analogy ended.

Private slewfeet of the make-believe world had color and dash and aplomb and Willie was as ordinary and as colorless as the inside of a phone booth. These other guys were debonair and always seemed to have exciting cases to solve. But Willie was a crumb, satorially, and his cases were as far between as Omsk and Chungking.

"I ought to git myself known as The Lone Hawk or the Scarlet Pumpernickel or somethin'," Willie said.

There was a prowl car at the curb but Willie was unaware of the fact. Two of New York's finest lolled on the front seat until the radio started fanning their ears. It was a stuffy night and sounds carried. Whatever was said of Willie, no one ever accused him of having small ears.

"Car Forty-two—proceed to Two-eight-six East Thirty-sixth Street at once—man found dead in Apartment G-Eight—looks like murder. . . ."

"Huh?" Willie yelped. "Who said that?" He saw the car leap away from the curb, got a glimpse of the letters "P.D." on the side. "Oh, cops! This Radar will win the war and close up criminals, too," he said and started yelling for a cab.

Willie Klump got to the scene and barged into the lobby of a small pueblo.

"Hol' on, Junior." Three cops gathered him in. "Where you think you're

goin'? If you forgot your yo-yo, you wait until later. You what?"

"He is my boss," Willie said. "I got called as quick as they found him. I—"

"Oh, yeah? Come on upstairs, sweetheart, as maybe you was on your way out and not in. Hid behind a potted palm or somethin'."

"This is an outrage!" Willie protested. "I am innocent."

"We got a suspect," a cop said when they shoved Willie into a small apartment and into the arms of a detective from Headquarters named Aloysius Kelly, more commonly addressed as "Satchelfoot."

FAST work, men," Kelly said. "Awright, start talkin' — er — YOU! Willie Klump, how come they picked you up? Oh, the dopes! Look, stupes, this character calls himself a private detective and how he ever got wise we had a murder . . . Willie, go over in that corner and sit down and shut your trap! Where was we? Oh, yeah—well, what was he slugged with, Doc?"

"This little bronze statuette of Venus de Milo," the medical examiner told Satchelfoot.

"That is what a dame can do to you," Willie quipped and even the corpse appraiser had to laugh.

Kelly summoned all his will-power and then asked who the victim was.

"Name's Cockrell Robbins," the morgue M.D. said.

"There was an argument over somethin'," Kelly diagnosed.

"In the next room, Kelly," a cop said. "A card table set up and the remains of a meal. They was big-shots, I bet, as they was eatin' meat. Pork chops, no less. That is the trouble with this country. Discrimination, as some people can eat meat an' some—"

"Shut up," Kelly snapped. "This is a murder investigation, not a forum of the airways. Let's look if they left any meat—I mean maybe we can git a clue—"

"With you them things are sure rationed, too," Willie could not help but observe.

"The murderer et with his victim," Satchelfoot said, looking over the remains of the deceased's last supper. "That is awful cold-blooded. The culprit used gloves when he picked up the statue, maybe, but take a shot at prints on it anyways, boys. Dust everythin', except Klump there."

"The corpse was once a home body," a cop said. "He cooked his own chow here. Funny thing about all the bottles in the kitchen though. They look like bottles I been familiar with at times only they got no labels or remains of seals on 'em."

"Somebody grab that elevator operator an' bring him in here," Kelly said. "Yeah, must be about three dozen bottles here. Washed clean as anythin' an' who bothers to clean labels off hooch bottles unless—I smell somethin', guys!"

"Maybe he was a vodville actor," Willie called out. "Every bottle has a different sound when you hit it with a stick. Call up Broadway Brevities and ask was Robbins a Thespian, Satchelfoot."

"What his religion was will not help, you cluck. And shut up and keep your nose out of this, Willie."

They brought in a palpitating Senegambian and the little colored character was getting almost white around the gills. Satchelfoot said he would grill him and Willie asked him how he would know when the citizen was well browned. The detective counted to ten and then started cross-examining.

"This Robbins here, who was," Kelly said. "Was he a boozer, Sam?"

"Huh? I ain't Sam. Mah name is Beauregard. Mistuh Robbins, he never drunk not a drop of likker, boss. But doggone, he toted a lot of it home the las' coupla weeks, he sho' did. Yo' can tell likker bottles wrapped up even if you don' see 'em. Once he dropped a package an' bruk a bottle an' brothah, that elevator smelled scrumpious fo' a whole week."

"Who et with him t'night?" Kelly asked.

"Huh? Ah don' know. Mah relief was workin' then an' he's almos' seventy an' has got cataracks on bofe eyes, boss. Mos' able-bodied elevator mens are in the Ahmy. He's so't of janitor relief man an' sleeps down by the coal bin. Ah'll git him if yo' want."

"Get him," Kelly said, then snapped something up from a chair. From where he sat, Willie thought it was a business card. Satchelfoot grinned like a hyena knee-deep in carrion. "Got somethin'

here. Yeah, Michael O'Toole Fogarty, Breezy Beverages, Inc. This little business card could easy pass Fogarty into the sizzle salon. Fogarty! I bet the old-timers downtown will remember that name."

WILLIE, noticing that Kelly was in a nice mood, began to saunter around the apartment at will. He pointed to the card table.

"One napkin is used and one is still folded up nice, Satchelfoot. It means one of the diners was a very sloppy character. See if there is stains on the stiff's vest and if his fingers smell of pork chops. Even the knife at the place where the napkin was not used is as clean as a hound's tooth. Never mind, I can look for myself."

"You keep away from that corpse!" the medical examiner yelled. "I'll attend to that."

The elevator boy came in leading another one that looked as old as Uncle Tom and just had a beating by Simon Legree. Satchelfoot asked the old boy who went down in the elevator last—from the floor where Robbins' apartment was.

"Mah eyes ain't so good, boss," he said. "But he was a powerful big man. One thing I knew he wore a green shirt. Ah kin see green as plain as when I was ten years old, yassuh! He smelled like he been rollin' aroun' in a saloon, boss."

"No stains on Robbins clothes," the medical examiner said. "Hands not a bit greasy."

"No kiddin'," Satchelfoot yelped. "I'm the detective here, remember? Willie, you stop orderin' the Doc around . . . Fogarty! Fogarty. The name is—"

"First the deceased looks familiar," Willie mumbled, "now a name sounds familiar. You will not git nowhere in a guessin' game." He looked at a calendar on the wall and then at Kelly. "Very odd," he told himself, shaking his head.

"Fogarty would wear a green shirt," Satchelfoot said. "So he was here and did not drop no callin' cards some other day. Guys, he'd better have an alibi when we pick him up. He—"

"Got it, Kelly!" one of the cops said. "He's got his name in the guest book downtown. Mike Fogarty was one of the bigges' bootleggers in the ol' days. Now he owns a soft drink outfit an' puts out a slop called Spep. It looks like maybe on account of the way liquor is gittin, scarce an' high in price, an' how it is rationed in some states, an old racket is comin' back, Kelly!"

"I was thinkin' the same thing," Satchelfoot Kelly said.

"Nuts," Willie cut in. "When will you stop usin' brains by proxy?"

"One more crack out of you, Willie, and I'll pin your lower lip up."

"You try it an' you'll never grit nothin' but your gums from now on, Mr. Kelly," Willie said. "I am only trying to help. Now I won't offer no suggestions at all. You are on your own and if that does not boost morale in the underworld, then I—"

But Satchelfoot had had enough and he ordered the two cops to evict Willie from the murder scene. When Willie got outside he ran to the nearest drug store and thumbed a telephone directory. He found out that Michael Fogarty lived up in Washington Heights and immediately went up there fast.

An hour later, Willie was slumped down in a chair behind a potted palm ten feet from the entrance to the big apartment house, and Satchelfoot Kelly and three of his satellites were escorting a very big and irate citizen out of an elevator.

"I tell ya I didn' knock him off. I just went t' see N—Cocky—on business, you dumb bulls!" Fogarty yelped. "Somebody musta come in after and—"

Willie got a good look at the ex-bootleg czar. Fogarty was still wearing a green shirt and by the wrinkles in his trousers, Willie guessed the big character had not changed his ensemble since meeting Robbins. But his light gray suit was clean and immaculate.

Michael Fogarty was past middle age but he could go three rounds with Joe Louis if he had to and not come out looking too bad. He had a chin as big as a twenty-cent piece of ice and a pair of hands that bulged with muscles.

AWRIGHT," Kelly yelped as his men convoyed Fogarty to the police car. "You admit you was there. You was a bad boy oncet, so we got to go over you with the works, Mike. The D.A. will think it ol' times talkin' things over with you."

"You got nothin' on me," Fogarty trumpeted just as the boiler left the curb.

"Strange," Willie said. "I think he is innocent of murder, but not of anythin' else, I bet . . . I'm tryin' to think of somethin', an' all that comes to my dome is Gertie. I wonder why? I better go on home an' try to figger what is cookin'."

In his room on East Forty-sixth Street, Willie took an old notebook out of his dresser drawer. On it was printed: Case Book of Detective William Klump. To be Turned Over to Police Headquarters and Prosperity in Case of My Decease.

"Number 1," Willie scribbled. "Empty bottles in Robbins' flat without no labels or seals on them an' the corpse never drunk a drop. Fogarty who et with the deceased or so the cops think was an ex-bootlegger who now makes soft stuff called Spep. What would he be doin' talkin' with Robbins? What is the motive?

"Number 2. Did Fogarty make a slip of the tongue when he said N—before he said Cocky? Why do I think of Gertie every time I think of bootleggers? I wonder sometimes if Satchelfoot even knows what day it is. Fogarty is *not* a sloppy character, but almost a dude. Nothin' adds up yet."

Willie Klump awoke the next morning, dressed very fast, and went over to Lexington where he breakfasted on crullers and coffee. While dunking, he read his favorite morning journal and there on the front page, despite the war, was the news that Michael Fogarty had been booked for the rub-out of one Nicky Pantelleria alias Cockrell Robbins.

The gendarmes downtown had matched the prints of the corpse with those of old bootleggers and had tagged Cocky as Nicky Pantelleria who once was the terror of the Loop in Chi and had beaten four murder raps before the Volstead Act went the way of the bustle and the crystal radio set.

"Oh, cripes," Willie gulped out. "Has Satchelfoot hit a jackpot?"

It looked very much as if he had. The police had grilled Michael Fogarty to a nice turn and had descended upon his soft drink bottling works on the banks of the Harlem River. They found that Fogarty was distilling very inferior brands of Scotch and Rye and putting them in bottles like the real McCoy.

The cops picked up a big wooden box full of labels of every well-known brand of giggle water on the market. It looked as if the harmless appearing Spep trucks would be used to transport the alleged stimulant to the various oases where Fogarty made deals.

" 'And so the old bootleg liquor racket rearing its ugly head in Gotham,' " Willie read aloud, " 'has been nipped in the bud by a master stroke on the part of New York's Detective Bureau.

" 'The arrest of Michael O'Toole Fogarty, once the overlord of the bootleggers in Manhattan, for the murder of Nick Pantelleria alias Cockrell Robbins, has prevented a wave of crime that would have been a dainty morsel for enemy propaganda agents and might have been detrimental to the war effort. Fogarty maintains that he is innocent of murder'."

"Huh," Willie said. "Two of the biggest old-time gangsters grabbed by Satchelfoot in one night. Now I have heard everythin'. What a racket they would have set up! The hookers in the swell night-spots would have been thinner than ever an' big night-club bosses like Sherman Dillingby an' Toots Short would make even more profit an' . . . I wish I could remember somethin'!

"Well, I will go to the office as there is nothin' for me in this case. I guess Satchelfoot has to do somethin' right once; if you throw rings at a runnin' rhinocerous long enough, you will catch one on his horn. But the more I think of it, the more I wonder—huh, there I go ag'in, thinkin' of Gertie Mudgett. If she looked like Veronica Lake now instead of how she does look, I wouldn't wonder, but . . ."

WILLIE walked into his cubby-hole of an office twenty minutes later and the phone was ringing its hooks off.

"Hello," Willie said, lifting the squawking public utility gadget out of its cradle.

It was Gertie.

"Now you know why Dillingby and Lavista and Short looked like they had fought in the golden gloves, when Hinchell called, huh?" she yelled in his ear.

"No. Look, Gert, I have a crime on my mind and have no time for such silly

foolderols. Call me up when—"

"You dumb crumb!" Gertie retorted. "Fogarty is locked up for murder, ain't he? He was sellin' hooch to the night-clubs. In the old days, they went around and beat up guys who wouldn't do business. So this Fogarty who is ol'-fashioned, went an' slugged Dillingby an'—"

"Huh?" Willie gulped. Something snapped apart inside his cranium. "Why, Gertie, you got somethin'! But maybe you are gaga, as why didn't those three big-shot night-club runners tell the cops after Fogarty was locked up, then?"

"Er, that is funny, ain't it, Willie?"

"Yeah," Willie said. "Unlest they are still scairt because a gorilla or two is still at large and will take up where Fogarty and the deceased left off. Cockrell Robbins bought liquor so's he could get the labels an' seals off the bottles to counterfeit them, as he never drunk no snake oil himself. Yeah, I bet there is a gorilla still loose. But how to find him, huh?"

"We should tell Satchelfoot, Willie."

"Look, he has used everybody's brains but our'n, Gertie," Willie protested. "Nothin' doin'. Anyway, he wouldn't believe us."

"You ain't kiddin'," Gertie sniffed. "Who would blame him? G'by, Willie."

William Klump, brain in a whirl, went downtown at noontime and walked into a certain restaurant often patronized by slewfeet like Satchelfoot Kelly. Willie's pet aversion was already hanging on the feedbag and talking to a contemporary.

"That big gorilla had his gall knockin' off Robbins and then walkin' right out to an elevator," Kelly's companion said.

"Yeah. Gall? Ha-a-a-a-ah!" Satchelfoot laughed while Willie's ears twitched. "We take him some chow las' night an' he tosses the oleomargerine at us, an' asts could he have some apple butter. Yeah, you would think he had lots of gall, Eddie. But what do you think he says? He had his gall bladder out two years ago an' can't eat no grease. We'll make him confess inside of twenty-four hours."

Willie took a seat in the booth behind Satchelfoot.

"One thing kind of worries me, Kelly," Eddie said, lowering his voice. "You said there was a set of prints showed up besides those of the victim. On a glass."

"So what?" Satchelfoot growled. "The defunct citizen was not in a cloister, so had visitors at times, ones who wasn't crooked or had no reason to conk him with a stature. Why, we got two sets of prints that was not on record over in the gallery. But we got Fogarty. He had a motive, bein' in the racket with Cocky Robbins. They fell out about who should git the bigges' cut, see? He ain't got a leg to stand on, Eddie."

Willie ate crackers and milk and waited until it was safe to leave the beanery.

Well, Kelly might be on the right track, but the flatfoot, he mused, never figured on hitting a switch. At the moment, Willie was sure that Fogarty had never assassinated any Cocky Robbins, alias Nick Pantelleria.

CROSSING the street, a gust of wind hit him a hunch that sent him scurrying for the subway. He went uptown and crashed the El Bonanza, was shown the way to the Dillingby office after he flashed his badge, but fast.

"You're nuts," the night-club biggie howled, mopping his pan with a silk hanky. "He wa'n't intimidatin' me, Klump. I never saw Fogarty in my life an' nobody's goin' to drag me into that mess, as if the public thought I'd bought bootleg—git out of here!"

"But look, Mr. Dillingby, you are helpin' crime in time of war by pertectin'—"

Dillingby threw a waste basket at Willie and he fled for his life. Some of the papers spilled over him and he fished one out of his neck. It was a bill to El Bonanza from the De Luxe Fish and Meat Sauce Co., Inc., Theodore J. Aspara, Pres.

He crumpled it up and tossed it away, knew Dillingby had been lying worse than a Goebbel's flunkey. He was very sure there was a character left who was still putting the heat on citizens like Dillingby and Toots Short and the others.

"But how will I ever find him or convince the cops there is, as they are sure Fogarty was the whole works. Oh, I better fergit it as it is the D.A.'s hard luck if he sautés an innocent crook by accident. Ugh!"

Ten minutes after Willie arrived at the Hawkeye Detective Agency, his phone rang. He picked it up fast, as he never knew when the utilities would cut the wires.

"Hawkeye Detective Agency," Willie answered. "Our operatives from Coast to Coast. The president speaking."

"This is Mrs. Elmo Flick, Mr. Klump. I live at Twenty-four Sixty Marion Avenue, the Bronx, and wish to hire you for the evening. How much do you charge?"

"To do what Mrs. Flick? If it is dangerous work, I would charge more," Willie said.

"It is both—guarding valuables and my son Ronald," Mrs. Flick said. "It is impossible to get maids now, Mr. Klump. I can pay you twenty-five dollars for the evening."

"What time shall I be there?" Willie asked. "Twenty-five is twenty — what time? Seven, huh? All my operators are busy but as Gertie works tonight, I have no place to go. G'by."

Willie arrived on time and Mrs. Flick gave him his instructions.

"There is Roland, Mr. Klump. There is a five-hundred-dollar diamond wristwatch upstairs, but most of all I want you to listen for sounds in the kitchen as there is a roast beef in the ice-box there worth sixty-seven points."

"I don't blame you," Willie grinned. "How's my li'l man, huh?"

"Nerts," Roland said. "If you are a deteckative, then I will start readin' about cowboys from now on. You ain't even got a cigar or flat feet."

"He's so cute," Mrs. Flick said as she departed. "I expect to be back at midnight."

After five minutes with Roland, Willie believed in gremlins. Roland tried to throw his watch out the window, climbed on him as if he was a stepladder and pulled one of his ears until it drooped like a poodle's.

"Don't you never go to sleep?" Willie yipped.

"Tell me a story, Mr. Klump. 'Bout Li'l Red Ridin' Hood."

AWRIGHT. Oncet there was a little dame named Red Ridin' Hood and she was takin' lunch to her grandma who lived in the woods because she made the best mousetraps. A wolf—"

"Like Pa?" Roland cut in.

"Er—no," Willie sniffed. "A real wolf. It run on ahead an' forgot it was meatless Tuesday an' gobbled up the old doll, then put on her kimoner and nightcap and climbed into bed. Red Ridin' Hood came in an' said, 'You sure got big eyes, gran'ma.' And the wolf said, 'How are you, babe? Er—the better to get a gander at you with, Toots. What's in the feedbag for t'night?'

"Red R. H. said, 'You sure got big teeth, gran'ma,' an hands the wolf a caramel. The wolf gits its false teeth stuck in it an' Red Ridin' Hood, who has met wolves before, picks up an axe and bops the wolf and then reports the killin' to the O.P.A., as you can't kill animals—"

"Never mind the corn," Roland said to Willie. "Read me outa this book an' no adlibbin'. You are gittin' paid for takin' care of me."

Willie wished the East River was handy. He was sure Mrs. Flick would not prosecute him too far if he heaved in the little twerp. He opened the book and began:

" 'Who killed Cock Robin? I, said the sparrer, with my bow an' arrer.' Why—er—" Willie Klump snapped the book shut and pushed Roland off his lap. The Flick sprout set up a squall that must have been heard in Hoboken.

Willie picked up his hat and headed for the door.

"You come back here," Roland yelped. "It is only ten o'clock an' Ma said—"

"Go play with a black widow," Willie said.

On his way out the door, Roland threw a toy tank at him and did not miss. It jolted his memory and almost fractured his skull and the president of the Hawkeye Detective Agency did not remember a thing until he got into the street.

"Well, one thing leads to another in the detectin' business," Willie said. "Roland has the makin's of a firs'-class thug. But maybe he has helped me put the finger on an assassin. Who did kill Cockrell Robbins, huh? Could be, Roland."

At nine the next A.M., he hounded the second-hand stores on both the East and the West Sides and by two P.M. he found what he was looking for. At two-thirty, Willie was at the De Luxe Fish and Meat Sauce Co., Inc., asking to see the boss.

"I got somethin' that'll interest him," Willie said.

The girl at the switchboard sent him into Theodore Aspara's office. Willie unwrapped a package and displayed a little bronze statue of Venus de Milo.

"A bargain at six bucks," Willie said. "Sold a couple already. They was part of art treasures from—"

Theodore Aspara stared at Willie and the ashes of his cigar sprayed his vest. Willie could not remember a more slovenly-looking character. Suddenly the citizen let out a snarl and drove Willie out of the building.

"I'll fire that dame for lettin' punk peddlers into my office!" he howled.

Willie walked back into the building and cautiously approached the girl's desk. The brunette snarled at him, too.

"Beat it, jerk. I almos' got fired."

"I lef' the stature up there," Willie said. "I don't dare to go after it. Here is my address and fifty cents for postage. Ship it to me, huh?"

"When we get around to it. Now get out of here before I call a cop!"

WILLIAM KLUMP, having delved into the study of psychology, unbeknownst to himself, skipped uptown and called Headquarters. He asked for Satchelfoot Kelly.

"Look," Willie said. "This is important, Kelly, so don't hang up. If you want to grab the murderer of Cockrell Robbins, alias whoever it was, come up to my office, as I think I'm a decoy."

"If you mean a wooden duck, you are right, Willie," Satchelfoot sneered. "Listen blockhead, I—"

"Michael Fogarty did not kill nobody," Willie said. "You better come up here, Kelly."

"Awright, but I'm a sucker."

"You are still flatterin' yourself," Willie said. "I'll wait here, Satchelfoot."

An hour later, Willie was talking to Kelly.

"I have an idea I've scairt a guilty party," he was saying. "You better stick close to where I live t'night, as maybe I will have visitors. I am in grave danger of my life, Satchelfoot. Look, here is what you better do.

"The room next to mine is vacant, as the landlady kicked a doll out for cookin' cabbage in her room this A.M. You go an' rent the room. Then, when somebody visits me, you will be close by with a Betsy."

"Willie, you would hire a weasel to protect a prize leghorn. With somebody murderin' you next to me, I could sit and read a book all through the crime. You ought to know better."

"No kiddin'," Willie said. "You don't want to be an excessory to roastin' a perfectly innocent taxpayer, Satchelfoot. With all the dough the government needs, too."

"Okay, I'll go along with the gag," Kelly said.

"It might happen tonight or the next night, all dependin' on how strong the killer's conscience is, Satchelfoot."

"I'm goin' to rent the room now before I change my mind," the detective said. "Before you make it sound even sillier."

* * * * *

The president of the Hawkeye Detectime Agency meandered to his boarding house around seven o'clock that evening. He knocked on the door next to his room and Kelly said:

"That you, Willie? Or the murderer? Whoever it is, have you got a can of flit as somethin' just hopped out of the mattress at me."

"Lay low, Satchelfoot," Willie said and went into his own room.

He read a stack of old comic books, turned on the radio and got his favorite crime drama and was wrapped up in the mullarkey when a knock sounded on his door. He got up and opened it. Standing there was Theodore Aspara of the De Luxe Fish and Meat Sauce Co., Inc.

"Hello, Mr. Klump," Theodore said in a soft voice. "I got t' talk to you."

"You bring my stature?" Willie asked. "Oh, you shouldn't of bothered goin' out of your way, as—"

"Cut the stallin', Klump. What was the idea tryin' to sell me a statue of Venus de Milo, huh? I looked you up an' you are a private detective." Aspara glowered. "Awright, punk, what do you know? Talk fas', baby, as I got a cannon."

"Well, you ast me right out," Willie said. "Why beat around the mulberry bush, Aspara? I noticed how your eyes bulged when I showed you the staturette. Nobody should use the Goddess of Love to fracture a citizen's skull with, pal. It looked like you an' Cocky Rob-

bins was on the outs for some reason and I bet it is because somethin' slipped up in that bootleg racket.

"Stop me if I am wrong, but after Fogarty left Robbins' flat, you come in through the back way, huh? You maybe deliver the black market bug-juice to El Bonanza an' the other bistros in your sauce wagon. Anyway, you forgot to wipe one fingerprint off the thing you hit Robbins with. You should use a napkin when you eat, Aspara, as greasy fingers make swell—"

I GET it. You know, huh? Want to make a deal, Klump? I need a guy. See, Fogarty was gettin' the spot Robbins—er, Nick—promised me. A partnership. I was gettin' left holdin' the short end, so I went an' fixed that punk's wagon. I figured I'd make a deal with Mike Fogarty after but who thought he'd git tagged for the rub-out. So, what's your terms, Klump?"

"Why, I never was so insulted," Willie yipped. "I am all out against criminals. Why, you fiend, you'd let Mike Fogarty get cooked an' you knowin' all the time—"

"I see," the visitor said and sighed. "Well, what is one more killin' more or less, huh?"

He drew his Roscoe and Willie yelled his head off.

"Kelly, you flathead! Ha-a-a-lp!"

He ducked under the first slug and got his arms around Aspara's legs. Aspara wiggled loose like a slippery Duke halfback and took aim again. A bullet whistled past Willie's right ear and chugged into a mirror.

"Satchelfoot, you dirty—"

Willie stopped the next thirty-eight caliber pellet, went over backward and collapsed in the corner under the washstand.

"It is the end," he moaned.

Then muffled sounds, some heavy breathing and some prime cussing penetrated his consciousness. There was a loud plopping sound, and somebody yelled all the way from China:

"Willie! Talk to me, Willie!"

Somebody helped him to a sitting position and his eyes cleared as he recognized Satchelfoot Kelly.

"So long, Kelly," Willie said. "Right in the old ticker, yeah. Tell the law I fought to the last man. which was me. Where was you? Did you stop for a drink?"

"You got it in the ticker, awright," Satchelfoot said and held a big silver watch in front of Willie's eyes. "This turnip would stop one of Eisenhower's anti-tank guns. The slug didn't even git through the machinery in it. No wonder you are round-shouldered. I got here soon as I could as I had to bust the door down as the crook locked the door behind him . . . You can git in the worst messes!"

"Ha," Willie said. "That watch has stopped for the first time since Bull Run. "You heard him confess, huh?"

"I sure did, Willie. I don't know how you ever got wise to that guy as I never even saw him before."

"There is always a first time for somebody to go crooked," Willie grinned and rubbed his stubble. "How I really did it, the D.A. won't believe, Kelly. I knew all along though, that Fogarty didn't kill Robbins. You should have known it, too, and I am amazed you could be so dumb even. Well, we better git this crook down to the klink and raid the De Luxe Fish and Meat Sauce Co., Inc."

Theodore Aspara, once confronted by the D.A. and reminded by Willie that three night-club owners would talk plenty now there was no danger of getting liquidated, let loose with the entire works. Mike Fogarty had beaten up the three swindle salon owners in his quaint old-fashioned way, and had wormed his way in as partner to the top crook, Cockrell Robbins.

"I was playin' third fiddle an' was promised a fifty-fifty break with Robbins. Why, they was even tryin' to muscle me out of that sweet new racket. Yeah, I took over after the rub-out and was getting ready to put in my own distillery. I wish I knew how this funny-lookin' goon tripped me."

They all turned to Willie.

Willie said:

"Who killed Cock Robin?"

"A sparrer," a cop said, and the crook's eyes popped out and his mouth snapped open like a fish stranded upon the beach.

"Why, you mean—"

THE D.A. and Satchelfoot Kelly exchanged sorrowful glances.

"Funny, huh?" Willie said. "Aspara

killed Cocky Robbins alias Nick Pantelleria. I was readin' a nursery soap opera an' all at oncet I remembered a bill for meat sauce that was stickin' out of my neck, but who would believe it? Kelly, how could you arrest Mike Fogarty?"

"Why the evidence—"

"Nerts. You saw the assassin had been eatin' pork chops and I said I bet he was the one that didn't use a napkin as the corpse looked so neat, huh? And right in jail you heard Fogarty complain about the mess, as nobody without no gall bladder can eat grease. But that is not what makes you so dumb, Satchelfoot. What day was the murder committed on?"

"Las' Friday," Kelly said.

"Sure," said William Klump. "A citizen like Mike Fogarty eatin' pork chops on Friday. An' the thirteenth of the month at that. You ought to pick up a fresh set of brains as they are very low in point value. It is hard to believe how I done it, ain't it?" Willie addressed the D.A.

"We don't dare put it in print, Klump," the D.A. said. "The department would get laughed at so we must make it look like very clever detective work, which will let you out of the picture. But we'll see that you get paid for your trouble."

"All I want is to know justice prevails," Willie said. "But I will put it down in my case book the way it really was. Send a check to my office, huh? Well, good evenin'."

"I still don't git it," Aspara said and pawed at his pan with two big hands.

"You will, though," the D.A. snapped. "And you know what!"

"I must go home now, Chief," Satchelfoot Kelly said deep down in his larynx. "I feel funny, like only one other time, after I saw my firs' seance. I hope I'll be all right in the mornin'."

"That's what you call really killin' time," said Willie Klump on his way uptown. He chuckled as he looked at the defunct nineteenth century ticker. "I must git it fixed."

Next Issue: WILLIE KLUMP in IT COULD ONLY HAPPEN TO WILLIE,
Another Side-Splitting Yarn by JOE ARCHIBALD

"I TALKED WITH GOD"

(Yes, I Did . . . Actually and Literally)

and as a result of talking with God, there was disclosed to me what is the most remarkable spiritual discovery of the ages. I discovered that in every man and woman there lives the most dynamic spiritual Power this world can ever know. So dynamic, and so fraught with tremendous possibilities is this Power, that its existence in you will amaze you with what it can do for you right here on earth.

For, being the Power of Almighty God, it possesses all the wisdom, all the ingenuity, all the intelligence there is in the universe. It is only limited by your ability to recognize and use it. You are living in complete ignorance of the staggering fact that when the Almighty created the human race, He ordained it so that we all can draw fully upon, and use, the Power of God himself. This is the greatest spiritual discovery of all time.

Try and imagine what such a limitless Power can do in your life. Think what your life would be like now, had you discovered this scintillating Power of God twenty or thirty years ago. Could there be any material or spiritual lack in your life now? Of course there could not. You may have often suspected that such a Power is available to you, but you never suspected that it already exists in you, instantly available, and ready to spring into action the moment you need it. Well, this is the truth. This is our new discovery of how the Spirit of God operates in life. God knew what He was doing when He placed such a Power in you. Your duty is to discover the existence of this Power and use it.

The whole story cannot be told here. But you send us a post-card with your name and address on it, and free information will be sent you by return mail. Send the post-card to "Psychiana" Inc., Dept. 210, Moscow, Idaho. May we suggest that you do not delay? If such a Power is available to you, you want it. So mail the card for free information now. The address again is "Psychiana" Inc., Dept. 210, Moscow, Idaho.

N.B. Collier's Weekly, Time, Newsweek, American Mercury, Pic, Magazine Digest, and scores of other periodicals have given much publicity to this Movement. This new discovery of the Power of God is a very dynamic thing as you will probably discover, so write now. Information is free.

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(Adv.)

THE BIRD MASTER

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Twitterings and squawks that presage looting and death hand a cuckoo of a murder case to astounded Police Detective Mickie O'Day!

CHAPTER I
THE BIRDIES SING

WHEN Captain Jim Doran phoned me to come to his office in the Detective Bureau down at Headquarters I had a hunch he didn't want to discuss the rainy weather.

"I've got a job for you, Mickie," he said in his deep, rumbling bass, when I entered. "Sit down and listen."

I sat down cautiously, as a man will when he is six-foot-two and weighs a hundred and ninety. Sometimes furniture had a way of unexpectedly collapsing with me and it always offended my dignity as a first-grade detective.

"Go ahead, Cappy," I said. "I'm all ears."

"I know you are—you've got the best hearing of any man in the Police Department," he said. "That's why I want you to work on this case." He frowned. "And don't call me Cappy."

I just grinned. I owed him a lot and we both knew it. Ten years ago I had been working in a steel mill and an accident had left me totally deaf. Doran had learned that I was anxious to join the police and had dug up a good surgeon who picked the pieces of steel out of my skull and made me hear again.

I made the grade in the examinations and finally worked my way up to first-

A Baffling Complete Crime Novelet

Dolly's pistol cracked, the knife dropped out of Sparrow's head and he and Hawk faded

grade detective. I was so glad to be able to hear that I'd trained myself to really listen, and I was good at it.

"It's a strange case," mused Doran. "I'd have thought Swenson was nuts, if it hadn't been for Brackton, and even with him I'd have put it down to coincidence if it hadn't been for Marshall."

"And we'd have ham and eggs if we had some ham and we had some eggs," I said. "What are you talking about?"

"Crimes and twittering birds," said Doran. "Three of them."

The more he talked the crazier he sounded. I let him keep on talking, hoping it would begin to make sense.

"Two weeks ago a private house was broken into on Riverside Drive," he said slowly. "The family was in Florida. There was only a caretaker at the house, but there was ten grand in jewels in a wall safe."

"Served them right for leaving the stuff around," I said.

"Yeah, but there's a law against taking jewels from other people, in case you've forgotten. And how a patrolman making his rounds saw the front door open and went in. He found that caretaker, Swensen, on the floor. He'd been hit on the head so hard he nearly died. When he regained consciousness in the hospital he kept babbling, 'I hear birds. . . . I hear birds! Strange birds!' "

"Just the wallop, Captain," I said. "You do queer things when you've been conked on the head."

DORAN looked at me. "Yeah?" he said. "Well, get a load of this. Three nights after that Dean Brackton, of the Park Avenue clan, is driving home from a swell binge. He's a guy about fifty, but husky. He's also been gambling, and has close to eight grand in his clothes. He's reached his private garage when he hears this bird—"

"What time was this?" I interrupted.

"Four in the morning!"

"When all good little birds should be asleep. Go on."

Doran went on. "He figures it might be fun to hunt for the bird when he hears it again. Then he hears another bird—and somebody saps him, and he goes out like a light. When he comes to the eight thousand is gone, so he reports to the police."

I let out a deep breath. It was crazy.

Doran went on and told me about the third case. John Marshall was a crusty, miserly old man who didn't believe in banks and kept all his cash hidden in his dingy apartment on the lower East Side. Two nights before he'd been awakened by a bird call outside his window.

Marshall thinks of his money. He gets up and looks in the safe. The money is gone—twenty-five thousand dollars, his life's savings. It seems to the old man he heard more than one bird when he first awoke, but he's not sure. He's certain about the bird outside the window though."

"And you want me to go hunting birds," I said. "All right. But isn't it a cold trail?"

"When I got the report on the Riverside Drive robbery and the caretaker raving about birds, I didn't think much about it," said Doran. "Then the other two cases came up and I decided to put you to work, Mickie."

Suddenly, Doran's phone rang. He answered and kept saying, "Yeah. . . . Yeah." Then he hung up and looked at me with a gleam in his eyes.

"That was Fred Swenson," he said. "He just saw one of the guys who conked him, and knows where the man lives."

"Why not send a squad car around to pick the guy up?" I asked.

"Because Swenson wouldn't give the man's name or address over the phone. Said it was too risky. He wants a detective to come see him at the house on Riverside Drive. He's back on the job. His employers haven't come home. Ten grand in jewels didn't seem important enough to break up their vacation."

He gave me the address of the house and said the absent family's name was Decatur. I drove uptown and onto the Drive. It was still raining and the day was gloomy. I didn't hear any birds chirping.

When I reached the Decatur place I parked at the curb. It was a big four-story house. I could live on the taxes its owner had to pay, and maintain a staff of servants besides.

The front door was half open. I climbed the steps and pushed the bell-button and there wasn't any sound. Then I yelled for Swenson and nothing happened. I began to feel a little creepy.

I pushed the door all the way open

and jumped inside, fast, in case someone with a gun or a blackjack had seen me and didn't care for visitors.

STILL nothing happened. The house seemed filled with bleak silence and was pretty dark because all of the shades were drawn, the shutters were closed tight, and no lights were on.

"Darned queer," says I to me. "I'd better take a look around."

Just the same I didn't want to go blundering into something. I stood there listening. Then my trained ears caught it—a distant, muted thumping, as though someone pretty weak was kicking his heels against something. I could visualize someone kicking on a floor as he died.

I located the direction from which the sound was coming. It seemed to be toward the rear, on the second floor. I hurried up the stairs. Once I paused and sniffed as I caught the distinct odor of Red Stag smoking tobacco. The kind a lot of folks use when they roll their own. I had to know about that thumping.

The second floor was even darker than down below. I carry a pocket flashlight and a gun, and it struck me that right now was a good time to have them both ready, so I drew them out.

The light gleamed on a closed door, and I was sure the thumping came from the room beyond. I reached out and opened the door, and the beam of the flash centered on a thin man lying face down on the floor. His head was still bandaged so I figured he must be Swensen. There was a knife sticking in his back, and if his feet had not still been moving just a little I would have been sure I was looking at a corpse.

I dashed to him, rolled him over on his side. I knew that nothing could be done for him, but I had to get his last words, whatever they were. His face was horrible as he opened his eyes and glared up at me.

"I'm from the police, Swensen," I said. "It's all right."

"Take care," he mumbled. "There's death—"

He almost passed out as he murmured the last word. I wished I could give him enough of my own oversupply of strength to keep him going.

"Come on, Swensen," I cried. "What happened?"

He fought back from the grave to give me a break. The agony sweat burst out on his face as he strained to talk.

"Before I was stabbed," he managed to mutter, "I heard a bird."

I was suffering with him, knowing it was useless to make any attempt to get a doctor or an ambulance. I said the first thing that came into my mind.

"What sort of a bird?"

Then I cursed myself for a fool. This guy was dying and I asked him about birds. But the effect was strange and somehow horrible. He pursed his mouth to whistle. His face became a dead-white, sweaty mask. Droplets of perspiration spotted his upper lip, and there in the room where he was dying with his last breath he managed to whistle.

A sound that was something like "*Pee-wee-oo! Pee-wee-oo!*" issued from his lips, then faded as a death rattle came from his throat, and he died in my arms.

"Birds," I muttered, staring down at the still form. "Birds that kill!"

CHAPTER II

SHADOWS

CONSCIOUS of all the sounds about me, I lowered the body of Fred Swensen to the floor and stood erect. There are times when I found my hearing too keen for my own comfort. It was as though I were listening to a great symphony orchestra, but instead of blending, each instrument was playing a solo part that only I could hear.

Somewhere on the third floor of the house a window blind flapped. The stairs creaked and groaned, and the whole house was filled with muted noises, like an old ship at sea. To me the beating of the rain on the roof was as definite and insidious as the drum part of Ravel's "Bolero." I could hear the swish of tires out on the Drive.

The bird call Swensen had whistled with his last breath lingered in my memory. I tried to whistle it myself, there in the room that held the silence of death and yet held so many sounds for my ears.

I could echo the call all right, and I

whistled it a bit louder. Then I stopped. The eerie sound, echoing and reechoing through the empty house gave me a chill.

But I had work to do. I began to search the place, not expecting to find anything much and hurrying because I must report the murder of Fred Swensen. Unconsciously I whistled that bird call several times as I scoured the premises. I did it as much to get away from the crazy feeling of unease at hearing weird echoes as anything else.

"*Pee-wee-oo! Pee-wee-oo!*"

Well, I told myself, if Brackton and Marshall reported hearing the same sound I'd at least know that the same person or persons were in on the three robberies, to which murder had now been added.

I found a telephone on the lower floor and phoned Captain Doran. He told me that the Homicide boys would take over and to wait there until they arrived, or until he could send the men in the nearest patrol car. As I put down the phone it dawned on me that I might be sticking my neck way out in hanging around the house alone.

"Mickie," I told myself, "you're a stupid cluck! This killer must have known Swensen had spotted him, so murdered him to keep him from spilling what he knew. That killer might be sticking around, and here you go all through the house whistling that queer bird sound. You're just asking for trouble."

I was mighty glad when a patrol car arrived, for it was getting late, and soon would be dark. I had the two cops take over until Homicide got there. I wasn't scared, but I had heard of few dead detectives solving a case, and I didn't want to try it as a gob of ectoplasm.

Doran had given me Dean Brackton's Park Avenue address, so I drove there. A stuffed shirt in a butler's livery informed me that Mr. Brackton was not home, with the air of being in a hurry to get away from a bad smell.

"Snap out of it, Jeeves," I said, practically rubbing his nose on my badge. "This is police business. Where did Mr. Brackton go?"

The butler thawed like an ice-cream cone on a hot stove, and named a high-class gambling joint. I knew the place, and it called for evening clothes and plenty of folding money. So I went home to get my dinner and dress for the occasion. Dolly—she's my wife—had a swell meal ready, and looked as young and pretty as she did when we were married five years ago.

After dinner I got out my evening clothes and dressed. Dolly sort of sniffed when she saw the get-up, and made some cracks about blondes, but stopped when she saw the serious look on my face.

"I'd like to take you," I said, "but it may not be all fun."

"You likely to get shot at, Mickie?" she asked anxiously.

"Nope," I said, though I wasn't so sure.

"Then why can't I go?" she asked.

"Business," I said.

"Monkey business," she retorted, but she looked anxious.

"Bird business," I said, and went out to head for the gambling joint.

IT WAS the usual place of this type, with plenty of plush and hush-hush. I never drink or gamble, so I wasn't known at the club. But I must have looked like ready money, for I didn't have any trouble getting in.

There were quite a few men there, and as I looked them over I wondered if the guy who had killed Fred Swensen was among them. I spotted Dean Brackton at the roulette table. I had seen enough newspaper photos of him to know him. At fifty he was still doing the playboy act, which struck me as silly with a war going on, but it wasn't my job to correct his morals or morale.

I edged up to the roulette table and managed to slide into a place near Brackton. I placed a fifty-dollar bet, and didn't pay much attention to it. Instead, I kept watching Dean Brackton out of the corner of my eye. I saw him literally smear the table with hundred-buck markers. He seemed to have money to burn, and he certainly had the fire going. It didn't trouble him, either.

He was a handsome guy, with thick white hair, six feet tall or so, and weighing close to two hundred, but there was no fat on him.

A thin-faced, dark-haired man next to him shook his head as he watched him.

"I can't understand how you can drop so much without batting an eye, Brackton," he said.

"Dough is to amuse yourself with, Carlson," Brackton said. "So I'm having fun."

He was rather belligerent about it, as though daring Carlson to make something of it. I saw he could be quarrelsome for no good reason. He was just the sort of a mug to have an argument with a killer and get himself shot or stabbed.

"And I haven't any nerves," he added.

To prove it, he took out a pack of Red Stag and rolled himself a smoke. He did it with one hand, too, and didn't spill a crumb of tobacco. It gave me a shock to find this guy smoking Red Stag after I had discovered the scent of it in the house where Swensen had been killed.

I edged over closer to him, and began to whistle, scarcely above my breath. My heart was hammering, for a lot or nothing might depend on the results.

"Pee-wee-oo! Pee-wee-oo!"

It didn't seem to have any results. I kept right on with it. Finally I could see it was getting Brackton's goat, but knew it might be that its monotony annoyed him, rather than that the sound meant anything. I noticed Carlson had moved away, as though the sound had annoyed him, too.

Finally Dean Brackton turned to look full at me.

"Listen, guy," he said, "are you going to stop that fool whistling, or do I have to take you apart?"

"Whistling?" I said, dead-pan, as though I didn't know what he was talking about.

"Well, whatever you call that noise you're making, quit it."

"Yeah, cut it out," said the croupier sharply. Brackton was too good a sucker to antagonize. "That stuff doesn't go here."

I quit whistling and stuck to Brackton like a leech until I got a chance to speak to him when no one else could hear me.

"Just why should a bird song get you?" I asked.

He stiffened. I grabbed his elbow, hard.

"Keep playing," I said. "You might get a knife in you, see? Cop a sneak in a minute and I'll follow if you're interested in birds."

HE WAS interested and excited, though he tried to hide it. And pretty soon he cashed in and departed for the men's rest room. I started after him, after five minutes or so.

"Don't you want your dough?" the croupier snapped at me.

I remembered then and looked at the number I had been playing. I had neglected to pull down or take in my winnings and they had automatically pyramided. I put five hundred dollars' worth of markers into my pocket and wondered why guys ever took up detecting.

Brackton was alone in the rest room. He stood watching me as I entered, his back close to the wall. He was not fool enough to risk getting stabbed in the back.

"Now what's this about birds?" he demanded.

"Just this," I replied. "Whistle for me the bird sounds you heard the night somebody took you for eight grand."

He glared at me for a moment. He didn't know me from Adam. But he was game. He whistled, and the sound that came out was no more like *"Pee-wee-oo"* than a hog's squeal is like the braying of a burro.

My props kind of collapsed under me, wondering just what to do next.

I guess I looked dangerous to him. He probably thought when I told him he might get a knife in him that I was threatening to do the art work with the shiv. Anyway, he swung at me.

But he missed. You have to shoot 'em fast to tag a guy who's practically listening to your thoughts. I didn't miss. He went down from a stiff right to the whiskers, out cold.

I left him there and walked out to the croupier.

"I just tagged Brackton on the button," I said. "See that nobody gets to him who might roll him, will you?"

I saw Carlson grinning at me, as though he liked the idea of Brackton being socked. I cashed in my chips and got out of there in a hurry before the croupier got the idea of having some of the hired help do a little fancy work on my rugged frame. The place wouldn't take too kindly to a good cash customer being knocked out.

I got out all right, and breathed a sigh of relief when I reached the street. I wanted to know about birds and their

calls and I had a hunch I might be able to learn a lot from some of the keepers at the Bronx Zoo. They had a bird house up there.

It was around ten o'clock, and the zoo wasn't open at night, but I decided to drive up, anyway. I might be able to find someone who could give me some information. So I got into my car, top-hat and all, and started.

On the way I tried to whistle as Brackton had. It wasn't easy. Try whistling the words: *"White-oak! White-oak!"* It was birdlike, all right, but certainly didn't sound anything like *"Pee-wee-oo."*

It was obvious that Swensen and Brackton had each heard a different bird call. That might mean there were two killers, perhaps more. Then I got to wondering what the bird call that old John Marshall had heard had been like. I wanted to know about that, too.

So I pulled to the curb, got out and found a phone booth in a drug store. Marshall didn't have a telephone, but I asked Information to do what she could, telling her it was police business. A neighbor called Marshall to the phone.

"Mr. Marshall," I said hurriedly, before he could hang up as his impatient snapping-turtle voice warned me he might do, "I'm after the men who got your money. I understand you heard bird sounds. Tell me if you heard either one of these."

I did the best I could to whistle the sounds, and he listened.

"Nothing like that," he snapped. "I know birds and the sound I heard was a poor imitation of the call the loggerhead shrike makes!"

CHAPTER III

Swell Wife for a Detective

I PHONED Thornhill, the head keeper at the zoo, gave him my name and told him I was a detective from Police Headquarters and wanted to talk to him about a murder case right away. He said he would be waiting for me at the main gate of the zoo.

As I drove uptown I kept thinking of my phone conversation with Marshall, which had made everything just as clear as mud. What did I know about loggerhead shrikes? The answer was very little.

By the time I was halfway to the zoo I had a hunch that another car was following me. It had stopped raining, but there were heavy clouds still in the night sky, and it was a nice night for a murder. But I reached the zoo without being murdered and parked my car in front of the main gate.

A stocky, gray-haired man was waiting with the gate open.

"Mr. Thornhill?" I asked, and when he nodded, "I'm O'Day from the Detective Bureau at Headquarters."

He seemed surprised at my evening clothes, but took me to his office and we talked. I told him I was anxious to visit the bird house, as bird calls played an important part in the case on which I was working.

"Is that really necessary?" Thornhill asked. "I hate to light up the bird house and wake up all the birds at this time of night unless you feel it's vital, Mr. O'Day. Perhaps I can help you by trying to identify the bird calls you heard."

"All right," I said. "Let's try it."

First I gave him the *"Pee-wee-oo"* call. He had me repeat the whistle a few times, then nodded.

"It's not exactly right," he said. "But it sounds like it might be an imitation of the call of the pewit, or lapwing. What else?"

I did the best I could with the call that Brackton had given me just before I had to sock him. Thornhill listened, then nodded again. The *"White-oak—White-oak"* whistle meant something to him.

"Might be someone was trying to make a sound like the call of the white-throat," said the head keeper finally. "That's a small bird found more in Europe than it is in this country. Is that all?"

"All except the call of the loggerhead shrike," I said. "And I know that one. Thanks much, Mr. Thornhill."

"I thought you might want to talk about some of the other birds," he said. "Like the rail, the redstart, the scale-dove. You know, *Scardafella squamosa.* Or the Senegal—*Lagonosticia minima.*"

"Not now," I interrupted hastily. "Some other time, Mr. Thornhill, and thanks again for your trouble."

He unlocked the main gate for me, still reeling off a list of unusual birds. When he finally locked the gate from the inside and walked away I was glad to see him go. A little more of his chatter and I'd have thought I was a canary and asked to be put back in my cage.

A dark sedan was parked halfway down the block but I didn't pay much attention to it. Just as I reached my coupé a little guy jumped away from the far side of my car and dashed for some trees and bushes at the edge of the zoo grounds.

It looked as if he had been trying to steal something out of my car, so I chased after him. It wasn't until I got back in among the trees that it dawned on me that I was doing just what the little guy wanted. He had run when he was sure I had spotted him, hoping I would come after him.

I REACHED into my pocket for my gun and cursed when I didn't find it. I had left it in my other suit when I had changed into evening clothes.

"All right, wise guy," said a gruff voice out of the shadows. "We'll fix you for being too nosy!"

It wasn't the little guy I had been chasing, but a big man who spoke as he lunged at me out of the bushes. I thought I was going to feel cold steel, but he didn't come with a knife. He came with his fists, and he was a heavyweight if I ever saw one, with some idea of how to use his dukes.

His teeth were exposed in a snarl, and as he came out of the shadows he reminded me too much of the ghost of Frankenstein's monster. He got in one good blow before I could get set, which proved he was pretty fast.

His wallop spun me clear around and showed me something that got me feeling a little jittery. If I had gone straight backward I'd have smashed against a sharp branch of a tree, broken off at just about the height of my shoulder-blades. It would probably have impaled me, and it looked as if that was just what the big guy had intended to happen.

I sidestepped and began fighting. I was up against a killer and it wasn't any time to do the minuet. I started the old fists doing their stuff and began to cut his face up like nobody's business. But he wasn't just standing around taking it. He was socking me plenty.

That wasn't all that was worrying me either. I hadn't forgotten the little guy I had chased in among the trees. I had a vision of getting fists in my face from the big man and a knife in my back from the little one. It wasn't a nice prospect for the home team.

I called it right though. Just about the time the big guy and I were both groggy the little man leaped out of the shadows. And he had a knife in his right hand.

"Look out, Hawk!" he called. "I'll get him."

"Keep out of this, Sparrow," growled the big guy. "I'll knock this lug cold in a minute."

And the way he was landing hard rights and lefts on my face and body had me nearly convinced he was betting on a sure thing. Then I got mad and the O'Days are not noted for their placidness in anger.

I biffed him on the chin so hard it nearly knocked him over. I blackened his right eye and made his nose bleed. Then I got in a straight right that came from way down here and landed just where I wanted it to go. The big Hawk went down looking like a dead duck.

But Sparrow still wanted to play. He lunged at me with the knife when I wasn't set for him, and got me with it the first rattle out of the box. He ripped a nice gash along my chest clear down to my belt buckle. It burned like blazes and the blood was hot on my flesh.

I hit Sparrow and knocked him back before he could get me again with the knife. For a moment it looked as if I was all set to report the enemy vanquished, then Hawk came to and grabbed me by the ankle.

I hit my head so hard on the ground when I went down that I thought I was going to pass out, but I fought against it. With two guys trying to kill me this didn't seem the time for slumber.

With a kick of the heel of my other foot on his wrist I broke Hawk's hold on my ankle. I managed to get to my feet, though it seemed to me I was doing it in slow motion. The trees spun around and the sky seemed pretty wobbly. I was nearly out on my feet.

"I'll fix you!" shouted Hawk. "We'll teach the police to leave the Birds alone!"

He grabbed me by the shoulders, his fingers biting into me like hooks, and lifted me clear off the ground. Terror gripped me as I understood what he was trying to do. He was using all his strength to smash me back against that razor-sharp broken tree limb.

I kicked him in the stomach, and he let out a yell and dropped me. I fell on my back, pretty much of a wreck. Sparrow flung himself in, leaning over me with the knife raised to do the rest of the job.

A pistol cracked. The knife disappeared out of Sparrow's hand, which was some shooting in that kind of light. The two mugs did a fast fade-out. They didn't care to have anyone hear pistol shots.

"I told you to take me with you," said a voice I loved like nobody's business. "What a time I've had trailing you around."

It was Dolly. The missus was the one shadow I could never drop if she set her mind to the job—which I was mighty glad she had done in the present instance. She is never afraid of anything, that gal. A swell wife for a detective.

I tried to cheer, but everything went black and I went out like a light. . . .

When I opened my eyes I was in a hospital with the dawn coming in through the windows. Dolly was sitting beside the bed, looking a little worried, but mighty lovely. I smiled at her, feeling bruised and battered but all in one piece.

I didn't feel like shouting for my clothes, and dashing madly out in search of a couple of killers named Hawk and Sparrow. I'd been a detective too long to consider myself a one-man Police Department.

"Good morning," I said to Dolly. "How long am I supposed to stay here?"

Before she could answer, a nurse came in with an intern who was making his morning rounds. He took my pulse and nodded.

"You're all right," he said. "Rest is all you need."

I didn't argue. I wanted to do some heavy thinking, and a hospital bed was as good a place to do it in as anywhere else.

The intern and the nurse left, and Dolly and I talked a while. She told me she had had a hunch that I might get in trouble and so she had trailed me all evening in her car. She had parked around the corner at the zoo after she had seen me go in with the head keeper. She hadn't seen me come out through the main gate, but she had finally become worried and walked to my car.

Then she had heard faint sounds coming from back among the trees and had sneaked back to investigate. She had arrived just in time to shoot the knife out of Sparrow's hand.

I told her the whole story of the case I was working on, as far as I knew it. I never was one of those strong and silent guys who act mysterious with their women folk. Besides, Dolly often had bright ideas that gave me some good leads.

"Sounds to me like there might be a bunch of crooks who call themselves the Birds," she said when I had finished. "And they use the names of our little feathered friends. You said the big man was called Hawk and the little one Sparrow."

"You've got something there, Dolly," I said. "I've got to get out of here by noon and down to Headquarters. I want to talk to Captain Doran. How about going home and getting me some fresh clothes so I won't look as if I'd been out all night getting myself bunged up?"

"All right," she said. "You try and sleep until I return."

She kissed me and left. A nurse brought me some breakfast and I went through the usual hospital routine until Dolly came back around noon. I had slept a good bit and was feeling fine.

CHAPTER IV

Rogues Gallery Photos

BY one-thirty I was in the Detective Bureau talking to Captain Doran in his office. I told him everything that had happened since I had left him the previous afternoon.

"So we know that Swensen heard an imitation of the call of the pewit, both when the house was robbed and he was hit over the head, and when he was stabbed," I said. "Brackton heard someone trying

to make a noise like a whitethroat, and Marshall the loggerhead shrike. It all adds up."

"Yeah, to zero," said Doran. "But go on, Mickie."

"Each bird sound is an identification, as I make it out," I went on. "It's a command to the person to whom it is addressed, and to whom it also identifies the one who is making the bird call. No gang of cheap crooks thought that up all by themselves. It was done by somebody who knows birds, and knows them well. He's the guy we've got to find."

"How?" asked Captain Doran.

"By contacting every expert on birds in New York City."

"And how do you expect me to do that?"

"Maybe there's a Curator of Orinthology at the Museum of Natural History," I said. "He'll have the names of all the experts at his fingertips. Phone him and get him to bring those men to Headquarters."

"All right," said the captain, reaching for the phone. "I'll see what I can do."

I stuck around while he called the museum. He had to do a lot of talking, but he finally put down the phone with a satisfied expression.

"The curator will try to have them all here by three o'clock this afternoon," he told me.

"Good! Now me for the Rogues Gallery and a gabfest with its keeper," I said. "See you later. And, oh, yes—try and have Brackton and Marshall here at three o'clock, too."

I went to the Gallery, where the old man who runs the place has more knowledge of crooks in his head than there is in the files. He's been there since they started mugging crooks and what he doesn't know hasn't been found out.

"Look, Mr. Casey," I said to him. "I've got a queer one for you to untwist. Is it true that you can put your hands on almost any picture anyone asks for without reference to the indices?"

"Just about," he said.

His face was beaming with pride in his own knowledge. He doesn't make much money, and is no detective—at least not on the rolls—but he wouldn't change places with the Commissioner of Police. His job is too interesting to him.

"What'll it be?" he asked.

"I'm interested in monickers and characteristics. I want the pictures of men who have strange nicknames like 'The Hawk', 'The Owl', 'The Buzzard', 'The Loon'—you know, things like that."

He nodded. "How about 'The Ferret' and 'The Mole'?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Nothing but names of birds."

He walked away from me and when he came back he dumped a fistful of pictures on the desk. I took a gander at them and got excited, for it looked as if I was on the right track. Everyone of those hardened criminals had some sort of a bird nickname.

There was "Buzzard" Blake, who had served ten years for robbery, but was free now; "Swallow" Carson, who was a killer, and "Robin" Hill, who was a third-term offender. I started looking through those pictures hoping to find a big guy whose nickname was "Hawk" and a little one called "Sparrow" but it wasn't so easy.

"More of them, Casey?" I asked when I had gone all through the first batch.

"I've got a houseful," came his muffled tones from somewhere in the depths of his files.

PRETTY soon he came in with more. I went through them all. I spent nearly two hours before I found the ones I wanted. Joe Quinn, known as "Hawk." He had escaped from prison and was wanted for murder in the first degree. "Sparrow" Larkins, also a killer, who had escaped with Quinn. Just a couple of nice playful boys.

"Thanks, Casey," I said. "I'll keep this batch." I grabbed a stack of pictures and left.

I showed Captain Doran what I had found. The first thing we did was put out a "pick-up and hold" order with a description of the two men. That went out to every precinct station in the city. Quinn and Larkins would have every policeman in the Department on the lookout for them from now on.

"Of course, there's probably more in the Bird Gang than just those two," I said. "Lord knows how many—but if we get Hawk and Sparrow and make them talk we'll get somewhere fast."

"Don't forget the guy higher up," said Doran. "For all we know he may be one of these bird experts who are due here in ten minutes."

I nodded. "And when these bird experts leave here, have each one of them shadowed. Let's see what we can find out."

"Behave, sonny boy." The captain grinned. "Don't try to teach me my job. I've already given a bunch of plainclothesmen their orders."

At three o'clock the bird experts were all there; fourteen of them. I smiled when I saw that Thornhill, the head keeper from the zoo, was among them. I certainly had gone to the right man last night. One or two of them looked like average businessmen. Others had long hair and a look of absent-mindedness.

I looked them over carefully, but with the exception of Thornhill every one was a stranger to me. Then I happened to notice one man's eyes, and had an almost positive feeling that I had seen him before.

He was a little old guy, who looked like a bird himself. I kept watching and listening when he talked. Then someone addressed him as Carlson, and I knew why he seemed familiar. He reminded me of that other and younger Carlson who had been in the gambling joint, and who had grinned when he heard I had bopped Brackton. Probably the two Carlsons were related.

In another room were Dean Brackton and old John Marshall. I went into the room with them.

"We're checking up on possible suspects," I said to them. "I'd like you to go into the other room, take a good look at the men sitting there, then come back and tell me if you recall having seen any of them before." I looked at the playboy with recognition then, and smiled. "Hi, Brackton."

"Somebody did a lot better job on your face than I did," he said, for I still looked pretty battered. "I couldn't take a chance of having a knife stuck in me, could I?"

It was pretty much of an apology, so I answered in kind.

"And I couldn't have somebody interfering with the law," I said.

Doran had fixed it so I could watch the bird experts without being seen. Brackton went in first. The experts looked at him curiously. He came back, shook his head, and my heart sank.

John Marshall nearly gave me heart failure. When he went in he called all fourteen of those men by name, shaking hands with each one. It was all of a minute before I remembered he had told me when I phoned him that he knew birds. It was natural for him to know guys with similar interests.

But Marshall, I got to thinking then, should have been in there among the suspects. If he were the brains behind the gang he might well have robbed himself as a cover-up.

I WENT back into the other room and gathered up the bunch of pictures I had brought from the Rogues Gallery, those of Sparrow and Hawk among them. I asked the bird experts to look them over and see if they recognized any of the men.

It took a long time to get through this, and I was watching faces all the time. Their expressions didn't change. Not one of those men, according to his say-so, had ever seen any of the criminals in the pictures. From the attitudes and expressions of all of them I figured they were telling the truth, and the captain seemed to feel the same way about it.

Before he apologized to his visitors for detaining them so long and thanked them for coming, I stacked the pictures on Doran's desk.

There was the usual confusion during their departure, which always occurs when fifteen or sixteen people are telling one another good-by. When everybody had gone Captain Doran sat down.

I dropped into a chair, feeling disappointed. The interview with the bird experts had not been much of a success in my estimation. If any of those men had been able to identify any member of the Bird Gang from the Rogues Gallery photographs they certainly hadn't given any sign of it.

"With that thought in mind I looked over to where I had stacked the pictures on the captain's desk. My eyes widened and my mouth opened and closed like a fish.

"What's the matter, Mickie?" asked Doran, surprised by my expression. "Is there something wrong?"

"They're g-gone," I managed to stammer. Then I got a grip on myself. "Somebody swiped all of those pictures from the Rogues Gallery!"

"Huh?" Captain Doran looked blankly at the top of his desk, as though unable to believe his eyes. "You're right! They *are* gone! But why, Mickie? Tell me that!"

"Somebody in that bunch of men who just left here did know and recognize some of the members of the Bird Gang!" I said excitedly. "Whoever that was took the pictures in the hope of concealing the identity of those men. Don't forget not only the names and records of every one of those crooks was with their pictures, but also their fingerprints!"

"Whoever did it didn't know too much about police routine," Doran said pretty grimly. "We've still got the original negative of every one of those Rogues Gallery files, provided all of the men were mugged here. If not, some other Police Department has them." He smiled then, satisfied. "It's a good thing I have a man tailing every one of those suspects."

"Wonderful," I said ironically. "And I suppose you can have detectives search fourteen houses, and have fourteen lawsuits on your hands?"

"That's true," he said with a frown. "Then what's to be done, Mickie?"

"It's my case, and I'll take care of it," I said. "I'm going looking for the cuckoo who stole the birds!"

Already I had a definite hunch. And as I barged out of Captain Doran's office I had decided to play it for all it was worth. We had taken the names and addresses of all the bird experts while they were at Headquarters and I had the list in my pocket. It was the little guy named Carlson who interested me and I had decided to pay him a visit.

I kept thinking of the thin-faced young fellow in the gambling joint who also had been named Carlson, and I was anxious to learn the relationship between him and the old bird expert who had come to Headquarters. From the list I learned that the old man was named Giles Carlson and that he lived up in the Bronx.

The bird experts and Brackton and Marshall had spent a long time at the Detective Bureau, and it was growing dark as I got into my car and drove uptown. I did a lot of thinking during the journey, and finally decided that I would try and nose around Carlson's place without being seen.

CHAPTER V

Sounds in the Night

AS SOON as I reached the street I wanted in the Bronx I drove by Carlson's place. It was a big old-fashioned house located in a lonely section with not many close neighbors. That suited me fine.

Across the street from the house I spotted the plainclothesman who had been detailed to watch Carlson, but I didn't let him see me. This was a solo job as far as I was concerned.

Night had descended, and with the dimout and all it was plenty dark in that neighborhood. I parked the car around the corner and sneaked back across lots. When I reached the house luck was with me, for a back door was open. I stepped into the kitchen.

Most of the lower floor of the house was dark, so I had to guide myself by my hearing more than anything else. There were plenty of birds there, for I heard them twittering sleepily somewhere not far away. I figured they must be in a lighted room, otherwise they would have been silent.

I made a bee-line for that room through the dark, and reached a closed door. I stood there listening, my ears catching every sound that came from the other side of the panel. I could hear a man inside talking to the birds, and decided it must be Giles Carlson.

There must have been hundreds of birds in that room, and the old man loved them so well he had pet names for them. I could hear him clucking to them, but not once did I hear him whistle a bird call or anything resembling one.

He almost caught me out there. He would have, too, if I hadn't been so sensitive to sounds. For when I heard soft-soled slippers coming to the door I had time to duck into the shadows farther back along the hall.

He stood in the light of the open doorway for a moment or two. He was Giles Carlson, all right, and at Headquarters we already knew that he was an eminent authority on birds.

There was a worried expression on

his old face as he looked at his watch. Then he glanced back into the room where the birds were—I could see cages lining the walls now—and he smiled. It came to me that whatever his cares and worries might be, he could forget them all in the company of his birds.

I waited anxiously as he put his watch back into his pocket and came along the hall. I didn't want him to find me spying on him. Fortunately he did not turn on the hall lights, and he went into a room not far from where I was standing. He turned on a floor lamp there, went to a radio and turned it on.

He had left the door open, and I could watch him, especially since he was in the light while I was in the dark out in the hall. He sighed and dropped down into an easy chair, watching the radio as though the program he expected to hear was important.

Music came over the radio, a bunch of solid senders giving out with heavy swing. I was surprised when I heard it. Giles Carlson didn't look like the kind of an old guy who was likely to be a jitterbug.

Then the band was switched down low and the announcer started the commercial about the product. Tooth paste I think it was—I didn't pay much attention. I was watching Carlson wiggling around in his chair impatiently.

The program proved to be a sort of vaudeville show on the air. After the commercial there were singers and comedians and more swing, but that didn't seem to be what the old man was waiting for so anxiously. Then the announcer gave a spiel about a special attraction.

"Next," she said, "we will present Peter Cling, the man who is so expert on bird calls that he has appeared on this program for six consecutive weeks and never has been forced to repeat one of his imitations. Ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience, I give you Peter Cling!"

I saw Carlson sit erect in his chair and lean toward the radio as though fearful of missing something. I felt the same way he did about it, for I had an idea that this Peter Cling, whoever he was, might have some definite tie-up with the Bird Gang.

The guy was good. His patter was amusing, and the imitations of various bird calls he gave were really something. At first I wasn't sure of it, then I realized that his patter had a definite tie-up with the bird call he gave. The guy was giving orders to the gang right over the air!

"Of course, if you saw a purple heron walking along Broadway at Seventy-first Street," he would say, "you'd think maybe that last quick one you had was a mistake. My friend, Joe Gilley, wouldn't be surprised though. When he's in the heavy dough he thinks birds are good luck, so he probably does right now. He made a killing at the races today. Now I'll give you the call of the purple heron."

Get it? Cling was tipping off one of the gang nicknamed "The Heron" that a guy named Joe Gilley who lived at Broadway and Seventy-first Street had won a lot of money on the races that day. I was willing to bet that Mr. Gilley would be robbed before morning.

I knew I couldn't get to the broadcasting studio before the program was off the air. Of course, I could duck out and phone and have the guys in a patrol car pick up Cling and hold him for questioning. But I didn't want to leave right now. I wanted to know what old Giles Carlson had to do with this Cling.

"The fool!" muttered the old man suddenly. "He has always been so headstrong! Now this. I must tell him of the danger."

He went to the phone in the room and dialed a number. When he got his connection, I could hear his words clearly.

"Will you ask Peter Cling to come to this address as soon as the program is over?" he said to the switchboard operator at the broadcasting station, and gave his address. "Tell him it is vitally important, please."

He hung up and stared bleakly into space.

Cling had finished his specialty and the swing band was blaring again. The old man cursed softly and switched off the radio. Giles Carlson *didn't* like swing.

I breathed a sigh of satisfaction. There was a good chance of Peter Cling coming here, and he was one guy I wanted to see.

I slid into a dark living room along the hall and crawled under an old sofa. I didn't want Carlson to find me and it

might be a long wait before Peter Cling showed up.

From where I was I could no longer see the old man, but I could get a pretty clear idea of where he was and what he was doing by the sounds he made. I heard the shuffling of his slippers as he went along the hall, knew by the excited chirping that he had entered the room where the birds were kept.

Time passed slowly, then finally a key grated in the lock of the front door. The door opened and closed with an impatient bang, and there were heavy footsteps going along the hall.

"What's the idea of phoning me at the studio?" demanded a voice that must be that of Peter Cling. "Haven't I warned you never to do that?"

"I had to see you," said the old man in a tired voice. "You are in danger. This afternoon every bird expert in the city was asked to come to Police Headquarters. I was one of those who went."

"Police Headquarters!" exclaimed Cling. "Why?"

"We were asked if we could identify pictures from the Rogues Gallery—pictures of criminals who had the nicknames of birds. I saw that those two friends of yours were among them—the big man called Hawk and the little man named Sparrow. I pretended not to recognize anyone, but I was afraid for you."

"And what did you do about it?" asked Cling.

"I stole the pictures," said Carlson. "I have them here now."

"You old fool! The police will trace those pictures to you and ruin the whole thing! It wasn't enough when you refused to pay my gambling debts, so I had to find another way out. Now you have to mess things up with the police!"

CRAWLING silently out from beneath the sofa, I got to my feet. I edged my way through the dark toward the door.

"I have been proud of the knowledge of birds that I taught you through the years," Giles Carlson was saying now. "I have listened every time you appeared on that radio program, delighted at your ability to imitate the call of so many birds. But tonight was different. As I listened I felt as though my boy had become a fiend."

"Shut up!" growled "Peter Cling." "Forget the sob stuff. I'm taking those Rogues Gallery pictures and getting out of town for good."

I heard the flick of a match, and then smelled the scent of Red Stag tobacco. Evidently Cling had rolled and lighted a cigarette.

I thought of the first time I had detected that distinctive odor in the house on Riverside Drive. I thought of Swensen dying in my arms, of the people who had been robbed, and of the two killers who had tried to murder me outside the zoo.

My face hardened as I moved silently along the dark hall. To me the man who called himself Peter Cling was not a man, but the leader of a pack of human vultures who called themselves the Bird Gang.

"I won't let you leave!" the old man said suddenly. "I'd rather see you in jail for life than to know my own flesh and blood was a criminal at large!"

"Let go of my arm!" snarled Cling. "Get out of my way, you old fool!"

I heard an oath, then the sound of a fist against flesh followed by a kind of moan, and the thud of a body falling to the floor. I drew my gun and raced along the hall.

When I reached the doorway of the lighted room a thin-faced, dark-haired man whirled toward me. I saw then what I had suspected from the moment I had heard the radio program was true. Peter Cling was the younger Carlson I had seen in the gambling place.

"Oh, it's you," he said when he saw me. "The guy who socked Dean Brackton."

I nodded, keeping him covered with my gun.

"O'Day is the name. I'm from the Detective Bureau at Headquarters. You're under arrest, Carlson."

"Looks like you've got me, all right."

He was calm about it. He took out a bag of tobacco and papers and started rolling another smoke. The first cigarette he had made was smoldering in an ash-tray. He paid no attention to the old man, lying unconscious at his feet.

I watched him warily, expecting him to make a break for it at any moment, but the trick he pulled was so old that I never even thought of it until it happened.

He shook the tobacco out onto the paper, took a deep breath and blew the tobacco squarely into my eyes. It stung and blinded me and I cursed and rubbed at my eyes with my free hand.

He leaped to the light switch and plunged the room into darkness. That was where he made a mistake, for I had trained myself to use my ears as does a blind man, and the blackness that engulfed us was to my advantage.

I knew he had a knife in his hand for I heard the faint clatter of it as he accidentally bumped into a wall. He tried to get me with it, but I heard him coming and moved silently out of the way.

I slid around, found that the door key was in the lock. I turned it and dropped the key into my pocket. He could not escape now, for there were no windows in the room.

Out of pure mockery I whistled the call of the pewit. He cursed and lunged toward me. But I wasn't there. I had heard him coming and moved to one side. I reached out and grabbed him with my left hand. The gun in my right rose, then came down on the top of his head with a *thunk*. He grew limp and dropped to the floor.

I found the switch and turned on the lights. Carlson was lying on the floor beside his father. I wondered what kind of birdies he was hearing sing now. The old man moaned and sat up as I dropped my gun into a pocket of my coat and snapped a pair of handcuffs onto Peter Cling Carlson's wrists.

There were tears in Giles Carlson's eyes as he got slowly to his feet. I knew that it hurt the old man to realize that his son was a criminal, for I was sure the elder Carlson was as honest as the day is long.

"I didn't know my boy could be so bad," he said, mournfully, as he sank into a chair. "For the past two years we have been almost like strangers."

"You still have your birds," I said soothingly.

"That's right." His face lighted up. "I still have my birds."

I nodded as I went to the phone, called Headquarters and got Captain Doran on the wire.

"It's Mickie O'Day, Cappy," I said. "I've got the main buzzard. We won't have much trouble rounding up the rest of the mob." I grinned as he began asking excited questions. "Tell you all about it later. And if you ask me this has been a bird of a case!"

Next Issue: COIFFEURED TO KILL—*a baffling novelet featuring Joe Bunt, the barber-sleuth—by* LAURENCE DONOVAN

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Misery of

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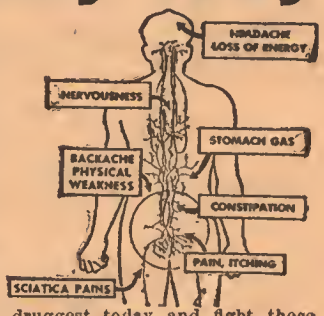

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(Adv.)

Martin found his wife with her head in the oven

TRANSFUSION

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Detective-Sergeant Larned needed canny wisdom to solve this mysterious death that might have been suicide—or murder!

DETECTIVE - SERGEANT Larned eyed Harrison over the edge of his cup.

"Oh," said Larned, sardonically, "he's a friend of yours. That's why you dropped in? You wouldn't be seein' him about an investment, would you?"

Then he gulped at a cup of coffee. It was past eight in the evening, and he was at his desk in Headquarters, so the coffee did not belong there. But he emptied the cup and put it in a drawer. The young lawyer, Harrison, scowled at him.

"I resent that," he said icily. "I'm here as an attorney. There's no reason Bob Martin shouldn't see a lawyer, is there?"

"Did he send for you?" asked Larned.

"He found his wife dead less than two hours ago," snapped the lawyer. "He was half out of his head when you brought him here from the hospital. The odds are he's still half out of his head. No, he didn't send for me. But I'm his lawyer and I want to see him."

Larned nodded and shrugged.

"Okay, okay! You'll see him. Maybe you can get more out of Martin than I can. I thought your line was bum investments instead of criminal cases, but go ahead. See if he'll talk to you. I've got a reason for tryin' to break this case before mornin'—I hope!"

The lawyer's air of truculence diminished. He relaxed.

"Tell me about it," he said less belligerently. "It's suicide, of course. I don't know anything about what happened, but Bob was crazy about Anna, and he wouldn't hurt her little finger. Suspecting him's absurd."

"It's dumb," said Larned. "I almost feel sorry for the guy, it's so dumb. His

story is he had a peach of a fight with his wife this mornin'. He left her cryin'. They'd squabbled over money, and they'd mentioned divorce. Then he says he came home from work all set to make up. When he opened the door, the smell of gas like to knocked him down. He barged in, smashed some windows, and found his wife with her head in the gas-stove oven. All the jets was turned on. So he went wacky, carried her out into the street for fresh air, and a cop called an ambulance. I was at the hospital on some police business when they got there. He was nuts—didn't want a divorce any more. I took him back to his place and looked it over. Then I brought him down to Headquarters. He's booked on a open charge. That's events up to date."

HARRISON stared at the sergeant with compressed lips.

"But you can't arrest a man if his wife commits suicide," he said angrily.

"Suicide—bunk!" said Larned. "Yesterday she'd bought a coat which she hadn't worn yet. A woman won't bump herself off with a new coat not worn. She might buy a dress to be laid out in, but not a coat. There was dishes in the sink, too, half-washed. A woman don't stop washin' dishes to turn on the gas. She likes to leave everything neat. And he admits they had a row before he left home."

"I don't believe Bob killed her," said Harrison.

"Guy," said Larned, "the darndest people do the darndest things! This is the dumbest trick I've ever seen. Killin' sticks out all over it. But you see what you can do. I want to break this case before mornin' if I can—I hope I got reason—but it's tough. Only I know it wasn't suicide."

"I'll see Bob," said Harrison, who had grown pale. "I think you're wrong. You must be. But I'll see if he'll talk to me, see if he wants me for his lawyer."

"Okay," said Larned. "Tell Murphy, back there, to let you into his cell."

Harrison disappeared. Larned turned his head to see him out of sight. Then he felt gingerly of his left arm and shook himself. He picked up the telephone beside him and dialed a number. It was the hospital. He asked for a doctor, by name.

"How you comin' on that Mrs. Martin business?" he asked. ". . . Oh . . . Keep tryin' . . . Yeah." He seemed to ruminate. "Somethin' just occurred to me. I'm workin' hard on that. How long would she have to breathe that gas before she kicked off? . . . *Hm* . . . Thanks."

He drummed absently on his desk after he had hung up. Then he stood up and went to the door. Once he swayed as he walked, and an expression of intense disgust came over his face. He went across the street from Headquarters to a small restaurant much favored by the Headquarters staff. He had a small steak and another cup of coffee. He went back to his desk, glancing at his watch as he sat down. Nine o'clock. Three hours since Bob Martin had come home from work to find his apartment filled with gas fumes.

Larned settled back in his chair. He lighted a cigar, and after the first few puffs looked at it suspiciously. Then he laid it aside with a pained expression. A long time passed. The widely-spaced, irrelevant noises of Headquarters on a quiet night sounded from time to time. Presently he tried the cigar again. It still did not taste right. He put it down reluctantly, and looked impatiently at his watch.

Harrison came out from the back. He was paler than ever and seemed extremely upset. Larned looked up.

"How'd you make out?"

"It was suicide," said Harrison. "They'd gotten to the point of talking about divorce, but that was silliness. They really loved each other. They had a last fight this morning before he left for the office. She was crying when he went away. Now he's nearly crazy, because if he'd called her they might have made up, or he might have realized what was happening. He'd have saved her life."

"Interestin'," said Larned, "but not enough to break the case. It wasn't suicide, guy. Too bad! I would like to break this down before mornin'."

"There's nothing to break," said Harrison harassedly. "I did intend to ask for a hearing and bail for him tonight, but he's in bad shape. I think he's better off in the cell than outside. I'm going to get his pajamas and so on and bring the things back here. I'm his

friend as well as his attorney, you know."

"Yeah," said Larned. "I'll phone the cop on duty at his flat to let you get some stuff."

Harrison winced.

"I see. A cop's posted there till the inquest, of course."

THE young attorney went out. Larned meditated for minutes. Then he dialed a number on the telephone. Again he looked at his watch. Exasperatedly.

"Duffy? . . . Larned speakin'. There's a guy named Harrison comin' over there for some duds for Martin. Let 'im have 'em. But check everything . . . Hm. Look in the medicine-chest, in case he asked Harrison for somethin' out of there. Look inside all the pill-boxes—"

Larned gave specific instructions before he ended. But he seemed dissatisfied. He was drumming on his desk when the telephone rang back. He answered it.

"Hello. Who— . . . Oh, Doc! How's it comin'? . . . That's good . . . Blamed good! . . . Swell! . . . Just what I was pullin' for . . . I'll 'tend to it right away."

He hung up, looking obscurely satisfied. He pulled a pad of paper to him and wrote. He jabbed at a push-button on his desk and a uniformed man came from the back.

"Murphy," said Larned. "Here's a written order. It busts all the regulations, but I'm takin' the responsibility an' that's why it's in writin'. See this gets done right away, huh?"

Murphy looked at the written order, nodded, and went out once more. Larned rather expansively leaned back in his chair. He pulled out a second cigar and lighted it, but after half a dozen puffs disgustedly put it down. The phone rang stridently.

"Huh? . . . Oh, Duffy. What? . . . You gave it to him? . . . Okay."

He looked contented when the phone was once more silent. He put his feet upon the desk. Ten o'clock at night is not a busy time at Headquarters. Once, somebody came in. There were murmuring sounds from the squad-room where uniformed police, off duty, loafed. Larned meditated, registering satisfaction. He ignored his watch now.

Harrison came in half an hour later. He nodded and would have gone on back to the cell, but that Larned hailed him.

"Say, Harrison! I got some news."

Harrison halted, with a bundle under his arm.

"What? An autopsy?"

Larned jabbed at the button on his desk.

"Nope, that's out. Always was. This is good news. The case is broke." Murphy, in uniform, came in from the back to stand by Larned's desk. "Harrison brought some stuff for that guy Martin," Larned told him. "Look it over, Murphy."

"How could the case break?" demanded Harrison.

"News from the hospital," said Larned. "It wasn't her husband. If he'd done it, it would have happened before he started for work. And she'd have been dead, anyway, four hours before he got back. But she wasn't. I should have realized it. The dishes in the sink were lunch-dishes, not breakfast-dishes. There wasn't but one plate."

"That makes it suicide, then," said Harrison, relievedly.

"Nope. Somebody did it," said Larned.

"Who, then," asked Harrison impatiently. "And why?"

"Some friend of theirs," said Larned. "Just guessin', they'd been fightin' about money and maybe that was it. Maybe this friend had persuaded her to put some of her husband's money into a phony scheme without tellin' him."

"That's pretty wild," said Harrison shortly.

"If he'd been careless, and she found out she was swindled, and could prove it and put him away, why, it's reasonable. Fightin' between her and her husband would make a swell chance for a guy to go to talk business, knock her cold when she wasn't expectin' it, and fake a first-class suicide."

"That's crazier still," said Harrison impatiently. "You couldn't prove such wild guesses."

SLOWLY the detective shook his head as he smiled at Harrison.

"I don't need to," said Larned. "I got a special reason for breakin' this case before mornin'. So I pinched Martin to make the guy that'd really done it worry. Once he knew we called it mur-

der, he'd try hard to find out what we knew. And when he found out we were plannin' to do a lot of diggin', he'd figure out the best way to finish up the case would be to have Martin commit suicide too. Bein' in jail for murder, to bump himself off would be a confession and settle the work. It would be pinned on Martin for keeps. So—Murphy, what'd Harrison bring in that package?"

"Pajamas, toothbrush, and a box of aspirins," said Murphy. He added detachedly. "But the aspirins ain't aspirins."

"I brought the box Martin asked for," said Harrison sharply. "I simply took it out of his medicine-cabinet. If it isn't aspirin, that isn't my fault."

"But it was," said Larned. "Duffy looked. He's the cop on duty at Martin's apartment. I told him to check everything. There was aspirins in the box when you took it. They ain't aspirins now."

Harrison scowled fiercely.

"What are you getting at?" he demanded.

"I've got it already," said Larned. "I need to pinch the right guy in this case before mornin'. You're pinched. Because when Martin got his wife to the hospital, she wasn't dead. She was only dyin'. Her blood was all poisoned with gas, and it looked like she didn't have a prayer. So they got desperate and gave her some new blood—a transfusion. I was at the hospital on some other police business when she got there. It was a one-in-a-hundred chance, but it worked. They called up just now, and it looks as if she's goin' to live. She ain't conscious yet, but she will be by mornin'. So I had to pinch the right guy before the news leaked out."

Harrison was starkly, lividly white.

"This is insane!" he cried hoarsely. It's lunacy!"

Larned got up from his desk. An expression of deep disgust went over his features as his legs wabbled under him.

"It would have been crazy," he said sourly, "not to break this case before you knew Mrs. Martin would live to name you as the guy who'd tried to kill her. You would have ducked. But I'm not nuts that way. Lock him up, Murphy. I'm goin' over to the hospital. You sent Martin over there just now, to wait for his wife to come to. But I'm goin' over to ask how long I got to feel like a sick cat just because I let 'em take a coupla quarts of blood for Mrs. Martin."

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The world's greatest sleuth tackles the most perilous case of his career in

MURDER OF A PLASTER SAINT, *by* ROBERT WALLACE,

book-length mystery in the February issue of

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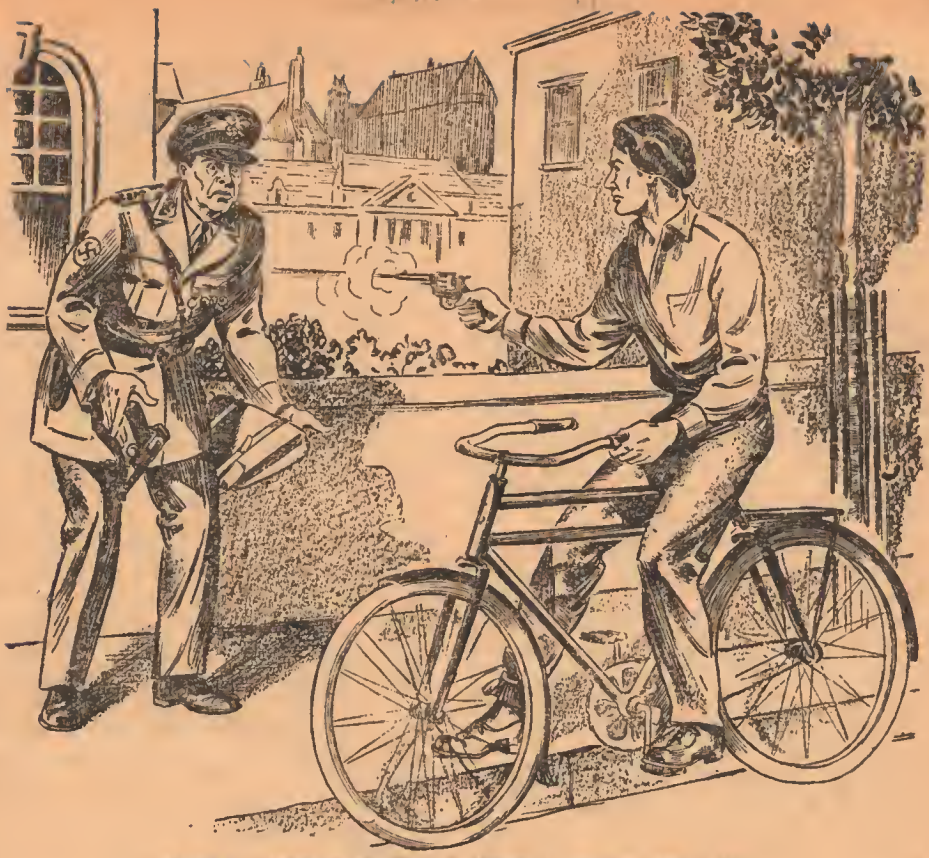
(Adv.)



The gun of the man on the bike was flaming at the Nazi major's heart

DATE WITH A THOUSAND DEATHS

By FRANK JOHNSON

Bill Kenyon, American avenger, plans a bold coup to bring an elusive Parisian spy out in the open!

PARIS was dead. Figuratively and practically. She was a dormant shell on the outside, full of listless half-starved people and swaggering, domineering Germans.

Yet beneath that shell, there was another Paris. It teemed with subterfuge and plotting, where men, women and children worked actively against the conquerers and lived for the day when British and American troops would come shouting in to save the entire nation.

There was also another Paris for the Germans. By day they strutted and by night they slunk, fearing every shadow and wondering which would disgorge some worker of the Underground. Patrols stayed away from the Seine as much as possible. It was said that the Seine knew the secrets of many a disappearance.

The Nazi major who emerged from a palatial residence seemed unaffected by these constant threats however. It was still long before curfew, and it was pos-

sible that the major had just received information that kept him so busy that he didn't think much about an attack.

This region was quiet mainly because the German officers had kicked out the wealthy people and installed themselves in the big homes.

This major had a briefcase under one arm and he walked briskly. There was nobody else in sight except one man who was slowly pedaling a bicycle toward the major, whistling with an odd cheeriness for a resident of Paris.

As the bicycle rider came almost opposite the major, he stopped and put one foot on the pavement. The major didn't look up. He was too busy visualizing himself in charge of all France—all Europe even.

"Major," the man on the bicycle said in German, "may I have your attention?"

The major looked up and gasped. A gun was pointed at him, too close for comfort. Automatically one hand dropped toward his holstered pistol.

"That's the correct procedure," the man on the bike said cheerfully. "Try to shoot me before I kill you, Major, because I'm going to kill you. I will, however, give you a chance. Like in the American Western movies. Odd, because I'm an American, too, and I—"

WITH a wild shout the major yanked out his gun. This foolish man on the bicycle had thrust his gun inside his belt. The major had his own weapon fully raised when it happened. An incredible thing, for one second the bike rider held no gun and the next he did. Furthermore, the gun was flaming and the bullet it spouted plowed through the major's heart.

The bike rider quickly seized the briefcase and pedaled away as fast as he could. A patrol which responded to the shots saw the bike and swore they heard the killer whistling merrily. At any rate he got away although they found the bike.

Oddly, too, the killer didn't think of himself as such. He was just an arm of justice, a soldier fighting on a peculiar battlefield as deadly as any over which shells exploded and machine-gun bullets whined.

He was an American, although he looked and acted like a typical clerk. His accent and mannerisms were perfect. And yet he had been in France only a few weeks as an agent of the French Underground.

As further explanation, Bill Kenyon, former head of a famous detective agency in America, was in Europe as a special investigator of conditions for the Allies. His job was to work with the Underground of each country in which he happened to be, although he had no official standing. He would be out of luck if captured by the Nazis—definitely a man without a country.

To balance this, he had unlimited funds, was answerable only to the President of the United States, and was free to work as a free-lance diplomat and detective in preparing the way for an equitable and honorable peace for the oppressed nations. A master of disguise and characterization, he spoke all of the major languages of Europe fluently and was well-versed in the history, manners, and customs.

Bill Kenyon fitted like a glove into the Paris work of the French Underground. With his own neck continually at stake, the brilliant private detective was at work on the biggest case of his career—the case for Uncle Sam.

Now he stowed the contents of the German major's briefcase in his pockets. The case itself he merely dropped into a convenient trash receptacle, left the bicycle under a tree, and walked rapidly away. He walked fast because soon now the Gestapo would arrest anyone on the streets.

Soon he walked into a modest house, using his pass-key, went upstairs quietly and tapped on a door. One man was waiting for him—Paul Becque, small, dapper and as hard as elephant hide. He looked much like the pictures of an Apache. He wore a greasy cap and kept a cigarette dangling from one corner of his mouth. Certainly he did not look as if he had been one of France's most promising lawyers—until the debacle. He had known Kenyon before the war.

"What have you found?" he asked quickly.

He didn't inquire as to whether or not Bill Kenyon had completed his mission. When missions failed, men did not return.

Kenyon threw the papers on the bed.

"You were right, Paul. Somebody con-

nected with the Underground has sold out to the Germans. Especially to the major whom—well, the less said about him the better."

Becque sat down heavily, holding the papers in his hand.

"If these had gone to the Gestapo," he said, "the eleventh important member of the Underground would have been arrested tonight. Who is the traitor, Bill?"

KENYON moved his shoulders.

"I don't know. He lives in that big house and is guarded like a mint. He's as valuable as that to the Heinies, too. Of course, he goes out, but nobody sees him on his way to contact the Underground and pretend to be one of us."

Becque nodded. "There are no more than eight men who could possibly do such a thing. All of these like money too much for their own good. Yet they have always helped us."

Kenyon nodded. "Certainly—especially the one who is selling us out. He had to build himself up, and now he knows everything. Almost everything. He doesn't know the identity of *Monsieur* Subway, who controls all the strings of the Underground. Even you and I do not know his identity."

Becque arose and walked the floor. "It seems so hopeless sometimes," he muttered. "You rid the world of this power-mad major who formed the only Nazi contact with our traitor. We know he hid that traitor and got from him certain information which leads to arrests of our men."

Kenyon didn't look so cheerful. "The major is dead all right and he had it coming—but heaven knows how many hostages will be lined up tomorrow. General Stulpnagel thinks a Boche sergeant is worth about ten French lives. I wonder how he'll rate a major?"

Becque turned and looked directly at Kenyon.

"What good is it all? The major is dead. You recovered papers which prove there is a traitor in our ranks, but we can't get at him. He is heavily guarded and the Boche will only send someone else around. There is no end to it all."

"If the traitor died," Kenyon reflected somberly, "there'd be an end. He's got to die, Paul. That man has lived too long. He has a date with a thousand deaths, ten thousand, ten million. Every French patriot would gladly kill him."

Becque threw his arms wide in an expressive Gallic gesture.

"So he dies then. How many French lives will be forfeit for his?"

"There is just one way to accomplish it, Paul," Kenyon said. "The Germans themselves must kill our traitor, believing him to be a doublecrosser. Your part is to assemble these men we suspect. Get them together tonight, in the house on Rue de Goering. Funny that a street renamed for the fat marshal is the location of one of our best hideaways."

"But we cannot allow the traitor to have the slightest suspicion that we guess he is at work," Becque argued. "He will not be suspicious of the death of the major but he might be of any loose suggestion I may make."

"Tell each one," Kenyon said slowly, "that he is to meet *Monsieur* Subway in person."

"*Monsieur* Subway?" Becque gasped. "But you do not know him. How can you bring him there? Anyway, it is too big a risk. He is much too valuable."

"*Monsieur* Subway will be on hand—and without risk," Kenyon said. "Now here is a list of names. Important men of France. Have each carefully watched. One will be arrested some time tonight. I must know the moment it happens. Is that clear?"

"Nothing is clear," Becque said testily. "However, I know when to ask questions and when not to. Anyone would think you suspected me."

"Perhaps I do," Kenyon said, with a broad grin. "Maybe I'm the traitor and just setting the stage for the arrest of *Monsieur* Subway."

Becque smiled and offered his hand. "I am sorry, Bill. To accuse a man of being a traitor is a serious business. You, above all, could not be the man. You are an American. You risk your life for France. You came here voluntarily to help us. You do not say so, but I know you must have high Allied connections. I will do what you say."

AN HOUR later Becque and eight men were assembled in the cellar of a large house. Above, lived an old lady—so old the Germans hadn't bothered her beyond stripping the house of everything valuable. The loot made

quite a number of packages to be sent home to the *fraus* of Hun soldiers. Now the place was one of the major headquarters of the Underground.

All eight men were as nervous as if they were going to be presented to the king. *Monsieur* Subway was an almost legendary figure, standing for everything the French patriots held in honor. His facile mind had plotted the big blows against the Boche. His mysterious influence helped to keep the Underground alive and vital.

"Why should he want to see us?" Andrew, a stocky middle-aged man, asked.

"Be quiet," another of the suspects said. "It is enough that *Monsieur* Subway sent for us to make this an important event. We have not been idle. Undoubtedly, he wants to reward us with more important tasks."

Paul Becque appeared. One by one he sent each man into another room to meet *Monsieur* Subway. None emerged again. They left by another exit. It was eight o'clock when the last man entered that half-darkened room. After he departed, Bill Kenyon arrived.

"I do not know how you arranged it," Becque said, "but *Monsieur* Subway was here, though, I did not see him. *Bien!* Better so, for I can never be tortured enough to expose him."

"If he were your private enemy, but still the friend of France, you'd never reveal his identity," Kenyon said.

Becque smiled. "Perhaps not. Now what are we to do?"

"We wait." Kenyon sat down, "Oh, yes—the German officers are to attend two theater performances tonight—one at the Theater Martel, a girly show which the Boche seem to enjoy so much. At the Theater Odeon there is Viennese music to which other officers are dragged by their wives. And aren't these two theaters in the same block, but fronting different streets? Their stage entrances face one another across the same alley?"

Becque shrugged. "You remember your Paris perfectly. You state facts, but what are they about?"

Kenyon laughed. "If we get the report on the arrest of one of those men I listed for you, then tonight we blow up the Theater Odeon. The eight men who just left here will meet us later on. They will help."

Becque clapped a hand to his forehead.

"*Mon Dieu,* and one of the eight is a traitor! He will tell the Boche commanders what is to happen. It will be a trap!"

"Yes," Kenyon admitted. "But when it is sprung, you and I and seven of those men won't be caught in it. The jaws will close around the traitor. Now go upstairs and wait for the messenger about the arrest. If he does not come, all plans are off for tonight."

Kenyon remained in the house and worried. He knew his plans had as many chances of failure as of success, and failure meant firing squads. Everything depended on excitement, especially so far as the traitor was concerned. He had to all but lose his wits at the proper moment.

Also, unless the arrest of one of those eight listed men was soon made, the theater performances would be over and Kenyon would have to postpone his trap. And each day meant some other important member of the Underground slated for one of those German trials which were pure farce.

THEN Becque returned with the news.

"An arrest has been made, Bill. *Monsieur* Anatole Chumbrey was quietly arrested twenty minutes ago by the Gestapo."

"There is still plenty of time," Bill Kenyon said. "Assemble the eight suspects. Oh, yes, Paul—there is only one suspect now. In fact, he is more than a suspect. He is the traitor."

"What is his name?" Becque said tightly. "I will wring his miserable throat."

"It is better that you do not know—yet. You are excitable, Paul."

"And what has all this to do with the arrest of Anatole Chumbrey, who I happen to know helps neither the Nazis nor the Underground?"

"When I am ready to tell you, everything will be quite clear," Kenyon said. "But our work has only begun. I shall see the men now. They are upstairs?"

"*Oui,*" Becque nodded eagerly.

Upstairs, Kenyon faced the group.

"*Messieurs,* you have all been considerably advanced in the Underground. You know *Monsieur* Subway. Keep his identity a strict secret. Do not even dis-

cuss it among yourselves. Now, being promoted, you will take part in a bit of sabotage that will cause the Boche many headaches."

The eight men muttered that they were ready for anything.

Kenyon nodded. "Then here is the plan. Tonight, at the Odeon, many high Nazi officers will be listening to the music. Enough explosive, properly placed, will bring down the roof on their square heads. A risky business but we, in the confidence of *Monsieur* Subway, should expect to take such risks. Is it agreed?"

It was, vehemently. These men would like nothing better than to strike a major blow at the Boche officers responsible for so many executions.

"We will meet close to the theater. I will have the necessary explosives. Four of us will be assigned to keeping an escape route open. I, alone, will enter the stage door of the theater with the explosive. *Monsieur* Becque will see that nobody blocks my exit. Three others must be placed at strategic points in the alley behind the theater. One will have a more dangerous mission. Andrew, I think you are suited for it."

"*Oui, M'sieu.*" Andrew came forward quickly. "You have but to command me."

"Excellent. Take two pistols and, as I enter the Odeon door, conceal yourself in the stage door of the Theater Martel. They face the same alley. You are familiar with the spot?"

"No, *M'sieu.*" Andrew shook his head. "I have not lived in Paris long. But give me only a moment and I shall be familiar enough. I am to see that nobody comes out of the second theater while you enter the stage door of the Odeon. *Bien!*"

"One more thing," Kenyon said. "If I do not emerge from the Odeon before the explosion takes place, you will all run for it. I shall be a walking torpedo and if I must die to blow up the place, so be it. To get me, the Gestapo will have to shoot fast."

"You are going to—commit suicide?" Becque asked, aghast.

Kenyon shook his head. "No. But the explosives I carry will be arranged so I can set them off by merely pressing two wires together. That is in case the Gestapo are waiting for me. Otherwise, I intend to plant the explosive where it will do the most damage."

ALL of them left then, one by one so as not to excite any suspicion. When they were gone, Becque mopped his face and sighed.

"If the traitor is among those eight men," he said, "you have given him every opportunity to save his own neck while you risk yours. Of course, the Gestapo will be waiting and when you enter, you will be met with a fusillade of bullets. Why not kill the traitor at once, then carry out the plan?"

"Wait," Kenyon said, with a broad grin, "and see what happens."

Half an hour before the Theater Odeon performance was due to be completed, shadowy forms moved toward the alley between the two theaters. Kenyon, bulging slightly with packages of explosives strapped beneath his clothes, was the last to make the journey.

They met in an empty house half a block from the theater alley. Through a window, Kenyon pointed out their objective. He sent the first four men to take up hidden posts and clear the streets if any patrols happened by as the explosion took place. All were armed.

Three others departed with orders to hide in the theater alley and keep their guns ready. Then Kenyon took Becque and the stocky Andrew to a front window and pointed to the alley.

"Remember," he told Andrew, "that your job is most important. If any Gestapo agent or officers are in the stage door entrance to the Theater Martel, I might get into a serious predicament."

"Let me make a suggestion, *Monsieu*," Andrew broke in. "We enter the alley together. *Monsieu* Becque can post himself at the mouth of it to watch. Then, when you and I are well in the alley, we separate. I will enter the Martel at about the same moment you enter the Odeon. Then I can cover you."

Kenyon nodded. "Exactly what I was going to suggest. You will need a submachine-gun, and Becque has brought one. It is not assembled, so slip the parts beneath your coat. There . . . they bulge a trifle, but this is no date with a girl, Andrew."

Andrew laughed nervously. "*Oui.* It is a date with death, eh? *Bien!* We of the Underground are not afraid to die.

When I get inside the doorway of the Theater Martel, I will dispose of anyone on guard, assemble my machine-gun and keep the alley clear."

Kenyon offered his hand. *"Au revoir,* Andrew. Perhaps we will not see one another again. If the Gestapo have wind of this and wait for me, I'll blow them up, too, along with me. After all, if I surrender, it is only to be killed in a far more painful way."

Becque went first. He scurried across the street so fast that he was hardly more than a blur. Kenyon and Andrew watched him disappear from the doorway. They looked up and down. No patrols, no signs of the Underground agents who were carefully posted. A grim silence seemed to have fallen over the whole area.

"Now," Kenyon whispered.

They streaked across the street and into the alley. Becque, hidden behind a big refuse bin, signaled that the coast was clear and every man in complete readiness. Kenyon clapped Andrew on the shoulder and headed toward the stage door where a sign indicated it was the Odeon. Across the alley another sign showed the way into the Theater Martel.

Music floated out into the alleyway. Opera, and the German version of swing mingled in discordant sounds.

KENYON glanced over his shoulder as he made ready to slip into the opera door. Andrew was half inside the music hall. Suddenly there was a fusillade of shots and wild shouting. A scream that lasted one scant second rose above it all. There were more shots.

Kenyon came out of the Odeon Theater door and whistled once. His men emerged from their hiding places. Within three minutes they had vanished and Nazi patrols which mysteriously appeared all around the region, saw no signs of them. By the devious routes of the Underground, they reached the old lady's house.

"What a colossal failure," Becque said, as they relaxed. "Bill, you did not even try to plant the explosives. Andrew walked straight into a trap and . . . But wait! Was it a Gestapo trap, or a Bill Kenyon trap?"

Kenyon removed his coat and hauled out rolled up wads of newspapers. He grinned without mirth.

"I carried no explosives. Blowing up the theater would only bring revenge. Andrew was, of course, the traitor. You see, Paul, *Monsieur* Subway never was here. I wouldn't have risked contacting him if I knew how. Instead I, wearing enough disguise to fool those eight suspects, posed as *Monsieur* Subway."

"Mon Dieu!" Becque cried. "No wonder you ordered me not to enter that room!"

Kenyon laughed. "I interviewed each suspect, complimenting him on his work and stating *Monsieur* Subway's confidence was so great in each man that the identity of *Monsieur* Subway would be told. To each man I gave a different name. The spy would, of course, instantly tell the Gestapo to make an arrest because the Gestapo has a huge standing reward for *Monsieur* Subway. I gave Andrew the name of *Monsieur* Chumbrey so when Chumbrey was promptly arrested, I knew Andrew was the traitor.

"Everything is all right. *Monsieur* Chumbrey will be released when they realize Andrew made a fool of the Gestapo by accusing him. Andrew also told about the plans to blow up the Theater Odeon. He was eager to get under cover because he knew of the Gestapo trap. Yet, there was an error somewhere."

"An error?" Becque asked.

"Yes. Some careless person changed the signs at the theater entrances. The Odeon sign was affixed near the door of the Theater Martel. The Martel sign had been tacked to the entrance to the Odeon. Poor Andrew thought he was entering the Martel when he stepped through the Odeon door."

Becque let out a yell of delight.

"So that was it! Andrew wasn't familiar with the alley. He went by the signs and the trap which had been set for you got him. The Gestapo opened fire at once, afraid of the explosive. But who changed those signs?"

Kenyon grinned. "I wonder. Now let's make some plans for a real bit of sabotage. This time without benefit of a traitor in our midst. We must work fast while I am here. Soon I must go to Belgium."

●

Next Issue: THE FOOLISH ONE, Another Bill Kenyon Story by FRANK JOHNSON

Gregg pulled out the automatic as he heard footsteps on the sidewalks above

THE COP AND THE COBBLER

By JOHN L. BENTON

Brutal killer Joe Gregg figures out a swell hiding place for a stolen diamond—but his guilt shines through!

JOE GREGG stepped stealthily back, keeping away from the windows in the living room of the big house like a thing of evil that feared the sunlight. He was a big, bald-headed man. His face looked as if it had been carelessly carved out of rock.

As he moved he was conscious of every slight sound he made. The faint creaking of a floor-board under his tread startled him. The faint rustle of the lining of the loud green and gray sport coat he wore with his slacks, sounded loud to his ears. He was vividly conscious, too, of the harsh ticking of a clock somewhere in the house.

Although the two servants were away, Gregg knew he was taking a long chance in entering Thompson Harper's house in broad daylight but a grim resolve had nerved him to run the risk. He had determined to steal that collection of unset diamonds which the millionaire was rumored to have in his Riverview residence.

"Birch Rod leading at the backstretch," roared a loud voice.

Joe Gregg jumped violently. Then he looked foolish as the voice kept droning on and on. Harper was evidently listening to one of the Tropical Park races over the air. That suited Gregg perfectly. It meant Harper would be so engrossed he wouldn't know what was going on in the house.

"Swell," Gregg muttered softly.

"That guy won't bother me at all."

He moved silently from room to room, searching for a logical place where Harper might have hidden the diamonds. In the library he found what he was looking for he felt quite sure. It was a small steel safe standing against a wall of the room.

At first the sight of that heavy black strong-box worried Joe Gregg. He was just a petty crook despite his menacing appearance, and an expert safe-cracking job was beyond him. Just the same he wanted those diamonds and he meant to get them, even if he had to force Harper to open the safe.

Gregg went to the box and turned the door handle beneath the combination lock. He uttered an exclamation of delight. The safe was not locked and he was able to swing the door open. He found the safe contained important-looking papers which he scattered about the floor in his hasty search for the gems.

FINALLY he found one fair-sized unmounted diamond in a small drawer, but that was all. He dropped the stone into his pocket with an oath.

"A burglar, eh?" said a quiet voice behind him. "Find anything valuable?"

Gregg whirled around. A thin, gray-haired man was standing a short distance away. In his hand was an ugly automatic with which he was covering Gregg. It was Thompson Harper, the millionaire. He looked capable of using the gun.

"Seems like yuh got me, Mister." Gregg's hoarse voice was deceptively mild. "How'd yuh guess I was here?"

"I was listening to the radio with the library door open," said Harper, moving closer until only the small rug, on which he stepped, was separating the two men. "I happened to glance into the big mirror, back there, just as you slipped into this room. Now suppose you pick up all those papers you scattered and return them to the safe."

"Sure, boss," said Gregg. "Anything you say."

He knelt down and started to pick up the papers on the floor. Suddenly he reached out, caught the end of the rug on which Harper was standing and gave it a quick, hard jerk.

Harper's feet shot out from beneath him and he fell heavily. Gregg sprang at him and reached the millionaire just as Harper brought up the gun which he still held in his hand. The automatic caught Gregg on the right side of his bald head. It cut a jagged gash which began to bleed.

"Hit me will you!" he roared. "I'll get you for that!"

He wrenched the gun out of Harper's hand. He was bigger and stronger than the millionaire, and as ruthless as a cornered rat when trapped. He knocked Harper flat on the floor and smashed at his head with the gun butt. The older man wilted and sagged flat, unconscious. Still Gregg did not stop. He continued to rain down savage, merciless blows until Harper's head was reduced to a soggy pulp—long after the victim was dead—grunting viciously every time he struck. All the time this was going on, the radio loudly blared out the winners from the library. But Harper would never learn the results.

At last Gregg got to his feet, scowling.

"There," he grunted to the body. "It serves you right! You should have known better than to fool around me."

For an instant he remained quiet, staring down at the dead man. The late afternoon sunlight, gleaming through the curtains of the window, formed a strange, criss-crossed pattern on the rug beside the corpse. Oddly enough, those streaks of light resembled a crude drawing of an electric chair. But Gregg failed to notice that. He still wore the callous smile as he turned away.

The sound of footsteps, approaching the house on the graveled walk outside, turned his complacency into sudden alarm. He glanced through the window. Two men were coming up the path toward the front porch. One of them was the patrolman on the beat. The other was a snub-nosed man, dressed in a double-breasted blue suit.

"The police!" gasped Gregg. "Some of the neighbors must have seen me force open the back door. They called the cops. The neighbors would know both servants were taking the afternoon off, and Harper was all alone."

Up to now Gregg had never carried a gun. He had considered it too risky, for there was always a chance of being picked up as a suspicious character, and

searched. But now with a chance of having to fight for his freedom, he gratefully dropped Harper's gun into his pocket and dashed for the rear of the house.

When he reached the kitchen, the front doorbell had begun to ring. But he ducked quickly through the door and ran out of sight among some bushes. He knew the police would soon be around in back to investigate. Then they'd find the lock smashed and that would show them something was wrong. He must move fast!

From here he edged his way along a hedge and back behind two other houses. Finally he emerged on the street some distance away from Thompson Harper's residence.

Gregg knew the vicinity well. He had been hanging around Riverview for two days and nights, looking the place over and mapping out his plan of action. He had been tipped off by a friend in New York that Thompson Harper made a habit of keeping valuable uncut diamonds in his big suburban house at Riverview. He had scouted the place for days.

MURDER had not been part of his plan, and now he was thoroughly frightened. After the police discovered the body they would send out a radio alarm and he was sure it would be difficult for him to get out of Riverview without being questioned. He must wait for dark.

"They may have somebody watching the bus station even now," he murmured as he went on. "Or would, by the time I got there. Nope, I'll have to stick around somewhere until night and then hitchhike. That's the safest plan."

Gregg remembered a vacant building that he had seen at the far end of Thorne Street. If he could get into that building he might be secure for a while. The cut on his head, where Harper had hit him with the gun, had stopped bleeding. But there was still dried blood on his temple and no way for him to wash it off.

When the Harper estate was several blocks behind him, he headed for Thorne Street. He had only gone a little distance when it dawned on him that his loud green and gray sport coat made him conspicuous. He could be easily identified from a distance by anyone who had seen him wearing it around Riverview.

"I better get rid of the coat," Gregg muttered. "And do it now."

Again he sought concealment behind some bushes. After transferring his personal belongings to the pockets of his slacks, he shucked the coat. He was careful not to forget either the diamond or the gun. Then he dropped the discarded garment among the leaves at the foot of a tree.

Producing a package of chewing gum, he unwrapped a stick and started chewing. The mechanical action steadied his nerves a little. Then he went on, traveling in a roundabout way, using trees, hedges and everything he could find to keep under cover as much as possible until he arrived at the lower end of Thorne Street.

Finally Gregg reached the rear of the empty building. Prying open a cellar window, he crawled inside and edged his way toward the front of the old house. It was fairly dark, though some faint light came in through the dirty, broken window panes.

About an hour later Gregg suddenly grew tense. He stood motionless, listening to the sound of footsteps and the rumble of voices coming from above his head. The police were searching the building. Doubtless they would do a thorough job of it. Any moment they might search the cellar. They must have known that he would not dare try to get out of town.

"I won't let them get me," Gregg whispered. "I won't!"

His words seemed to echo back to him mockingly. He knew that he did not dare try to climb back out through the window by which he had entered. The house was surrounded—he felt sure of it.

He went to it and peered through the front window. Beyond the window was a small light well. At the top of this an iron grating was built into the sidewalk above.

Gregg silently opened the window and crawled through it. When he was in the space beneath the grating he reached in through the window and drew down a tattered old window shade and then closed the window from the outside.

He crouched there, back in the shad-

ows at one side of the air well. His jaws moved steadily as he chewed the gum. Now if the police searched the cellar they wouldn't find him unless they decided to look out here—and he didn't think they would do that.

"No sign of him yet," called out a voice from somewhere on the street. "Keep looking."

Gregg pulled out the automatic and waited anxiously as he heard footsteps on the sidewalk above. A policeman appeared, gun in hand. He stopped on top of the grating and stood there, waiting.

Joe Gregg recognized him, for he had checked on the Riverview police during the time he had been hanging around the suburb. It was Mike O'Shay. O'Shay had been the officer Gregg had seen walking toward Harper's house right after the murder.

CROUCHING there in the light well, it dawned on Gregg that having Harper's diamond in his possession might be dangerous. If it was found on him that stone would prove he was the man who killed Harper.

He must get rid of that diamond for the time being at least. He didn't dare hide it anywhere around this old building. He might never get a chance to return here without arousing dangerous suspicions. He looked up at O'Shay's big foot on the grating above him and then grinned as an idea struck him.

He took the diamond out of his pocket, wadded it into the gum he had been chewing, reached up and stuck it on the bottom of O'Shay's shoe, just in front of the heel. The gum stuck firmly and it was in such a position that the officer would not even know it was there while walking around. Unless O'Shay took off his shoes there was little chance of discovering anything. Then he would probably throw the gum away in disgust, never dreaming what it contained.

Gregg had watched the policeman closely. He knew that O'Shay had a habit of dropping in for a chat with Dan Kenny, the only shoemaker in Riverview each afternoon, after going off duty. Gregg had often noticed the two men sitting in the shop, talking together. They always did it.

Knowing these things to be the case, Gregg decided it would be simple for him to get the diamond back, providing he didn't wait too long. After he had escaped from this trap and the excitement had died down, he could lay for the cop some place near the cobbler's shop, knock him over and recover the stone. Yep, it ought to be a cinch.

Gregg heard an automobile drive up and stop in the street in front of the house. He surmised it must be a police radio car because a loud voice spoke to O'Shay from across the sidewalk.

"Looks like the killer got away, after all," said the voice above. "The guy that was seen running out of Harper's house wore a loud green and gray sport coat, as you know. Well, we just got a report from a man who drove into town. This fellow said he saw a car headed for the city pick up a hitch-hiker dressed like that."

"Then we might as well quit searching for the murderer in here," said O'Shay. "That suits me fine. It's time for me to go off duty anyway and I want to see Kenny, the cobbler."

Gregg breathed a sigh of relief. Evidently some tramp had found the coat he had discarded and left Riverview wearing it. That was a stroke of luck for Joe Gregg.

He waited for ten minutes after the police had left. The street in the vicinity of the old building had become quiet, once more. Gregg went back into the cellar. The water down there had been shut off but he turned it on and washed the dried blood off his head. Then got out of the place.

He had rented a room in a cottage, near Thorne Street. He strolled to the cottage, unconcernedly, went to his room and changed his clothes. Then he headed for Dan Kenny's shoe repair shop, knowing he would find Officer O'Shay there.

When he reached the shop Gregg glanced in through the window and nodded with satisfaction. O'Shay was sitting in one of the little knee-high booths where customers sometimes sat while waiting to have their shoes repaired. The policeman was talking to the cobbler.

After a moment's thought, Joe Gregg walked boldly into the shop. O'Shay and Kenny stopped talking. Kenny turned around.

"Something I can do for you, Mister?" asked Kenny.

"Yes." Gregg nodded his head. "I'd like to have a pair of shoes made. But they must be very comfortable. I do a lot of walking."

"I guess I can give you what you want," said the shoemaker. "Any special type of shoe in mind?"

"Well, maybe like a policeman would wear," said Gregg, glancing at O'Shay. "They stay on their feet a good deal. Would you mind showing me one of your feet, Officer?"

"Shoes like this?" O'Shay reached down and held out a shoe. Evidently he had taken it off before Gregg entered the place to get it half-soled, for there was a worn place in the sole Gregg had failed to notice while down in the cellar. Also he was upside-down. In the instep, clearly visible, was the wad of gum Gregg was after.

JOE GREGG cursed and snatched out the automatic. He saw that O'Shay knew exactly why he was there. He pulled the hammer back and thumbed off the safety catch, as he aimed the gun at O'Shay.

"I'll take that shoe," Gregg snarled. "Hand it over."

The policeman flung the shoe. It caught Gregg squarely in the face as he squeezed the trigger of the automatic, but the gun merely clicked. He tried it again and nothing happened.

A service revolver appeared in O'Shay's hand as the police officer stepped out of the booth in his stocking feet.

"All right, killer," O'Shay said grimly. "We've been sitting here hoping the guy who stuck that diamond on the bottom of my shoe would come back to get it. Kenny discovered it as soon as I took off my shoes to have them half-soled. When he tried to remove that soft gum he felt the diamond right away. Your trick might have worked, killer, if the gum had had a little more time to harden."

In a wild rage, Joe Gregg tried to fire the automatic again, but the gun would not shoot. Disgusted he flung it to the floor and the shoemaker picked it up.

"Why, it's Thompson Harper's gun," said Kenny, as he looked at the automatic. "Harper was one of my oldest friends. I've known him for twenty years—long before he became a millionaire. He showed me the gun often, when I went to the house to play chess with him." The cobbler smiled. "Harper trusted me more than he did any other living person, I guess. And this man stole more than he realized."

Kenny drew the clip out from the automatic and shook it.

A number of small diamonds dropped into his palm.

"Here is where Harper kept his famous diamond collection. His mistake was in trying to bluff a burglar with a gun which wouldn't shoot. I often advised him to get another weapon, but he always laughed at me. So I can guess just about what happened."

Joe Gregg stood staring blankly at the gleaming stones in the shoemaker's hand. He felt sick as he realized that he had all of the diamonds with him, and he had trapped himself by his attempt to get back just one stone.

"Good thing I dropped in to see if Mr. Harper wanted to buy a couple of tickets for the Police Benefit Dance," said O'Shay. "If I hadn't gone there, and the neighbors had yelled to me out of their windows, you might have got out of town before the murder was discovered."

Joe Gregg glanced toward the door of the shop. He was considering making a dash for it—even though O'Shay had him covered with a gun. The policeman might miss, and O'Shay couldn't run far in his socks.

Despair settled over the killer as two uniformed policemen stepped into the shop. There was no longer any chance of escape.

"Glad you boys showed up," said O'Shay. "We've caught the murderer of Thompson Harper. Take him to the station and book him on a murder charge. I don't want to put on my shoes yet. One of them is part of the evidence." He grinned. "Guess I'll have to send home for another pair."

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Joe Bunt, the barber-sleuth, cracks a marijuana racket wide open in
COIFFEURED TO KILL, *an exciting complete novelet by*
LAURENCE DONOVAN *coming in the next issue!*

The Big-Top Mystery

By THOMSON BURTIS

Circus roustabout Rick Jorgenson faces the toughest decision of his life when he is confronted by Krag Brady, who knows too much about him—and offers a grim choice!

CHAPTER I

GARGOYLE FACE

PALLIDLY, Rick Jorgenson was facing the tall stranger who called himself Krag Brady, at the extreme back end of the circus lot. A hundred feet away were the horse tents, sidewalls rolled up to reveal more than a hundred ponderously beautiful dappled grays—the superb baggage stock which drew the wagons of the Young-Burnham show. Beyond them was the backyard and the Big Top, whence came the strains of the "Blue Danube." This indicated that divers members of the Ford Flying Troupe were being thrown through the air — and caught—with the greatest of ease. That, in turn, meant that the matinee would break in twenty minutes.

Rick Jorgenson, whose real name was Eric, recoiled at something Brady had said. His lips curled back to reveal discolored, irregular teeth.

"The menagerie top?" Rick gasped. "I won't do it!"

"Look who's talking," rasped the hatchet-faced Brady. His eyes were as cold as ice. But his thin lips were smiling. "You'll do it, and like it."

Then, as Jorgenson fought for words, Brady went on.

"They want you for murder in Astor City, Colorado, don't they?"

Jorgenson's magnificent shoulders slumped.

"So yuh know that too, do yuh?" he mumbled.

Every vestige of fight had left him.

"Of course I know it. Just as I know that Curly Summers is your real boss. I know you were planted here as a spy for the Summers show to do this outfit all the harm you can. One false move and you go to the gas cell in Colorado, which is why Summers trusts you. Anything else you'd like to hear about yourself?"

Jorgenson did not answer. His dull eyes stared.

"Now do you think you'll quit telling me what you will or won't do?" Brady asked.

There was something appalling about Brady's flat voice, thin face, and stony eyes which could not be accounted for by those features in themselves. Nor by anything in his outward appearance. As a matter of fact, his facade was superficiously attractive. Tall, slender, dressed in well-tailored gabardine and a straw sailor, this man in his late thirties nevertheless exuded evil.

HIS features were sharp and regular, eyes small and reptilian, mouth wide and almost lipless. His skin gave the effect of having been hammered into hardness. It was as though Brady were made of clammy stone. Something about him hypnotized Jorgenson, because it was new to Jorgenson's experience.

And Jorgenson was not without experience with the scum of life.

Then the young canvasman exploded.

"I didn't murder that guy. It was a feud between the Summers show and

A GRIPPING COMPLETE NOVELET

With fatalistic calm Rick Jorgenson rode the pole down

some wise guys, and I hit him too hard."

"Stow the alibis," Brady interrupted brutally. "If Astor City ever catches up to you, they'll string you up before you ever get to the clink. In fact, lynching a guy with a pan like yours would be a public service."

Jorgenson was hardened to taunts about his personal appearance, but this uncalled for cruelty made him wince a little. He recalled every detail of the disfigurements which made of his countenance an almost unbelievable caricature of a face.

The scar from a shive slash had drawn down one eyelid until that eye was a glaring monstrosity, and another knife cut had twisted his mouth into a permanent leer. The lips were puffed as the result of six months as a punching bag for professional fighters, and two cauliflower ears were additional souvenirs of both the boxing and wrestling rings. A sizeable cyst protruded from one cheek. Scar tissue around both eyes, plus assorted lumps and declivities, completed what might have been the mask of a gargoyle.

He rarely bothered to wash the hateful thing, nor to comb the tangled thicket of unkempt blond hair which completed his unprepossessing ensemble.

But Jorgenson did have one physical asset, which Brady was now appraising with a professional eye.

Sweat-soaked shirt and overalls were plastered to sloping shoulders, arched chest, almost non-existent hips and long, straight legs. Standing there in the sunlight with hard muscles visible through the rents in his filthy work clothes, Jorgenson was like a piece of glorious sculpture crowned by the head of an animal.

Brady nodded with satisfaction. Then he took from his inside coat pocket a slim little object which looked like a large mechanical pencil.

"In a little while," he said, "you're going to take this little gadget and sew it into the canvas of the menagerie tent. Great little invention, this — Germans used it in the last war. At a certain time—any time you want—*poof!* And that dried up canvas will be the prettiest bonfire you ever saw."

"And all them animals burn? I won't do it! The boss can tip off Astor City—I won't do it!"

Each anguished word was wrenched from Jorgenson by a physical effort. Brady studied him sardonically. Strange, that tortured outburst from this human gorilla.

"Who said anything about burning the animals?" Brady's voice was contemptuous. "Curly Summers isn't that kind of a guy. He's a business man in a knock-down drag-out fight with this show.

"Listen. I'll set this thing to go off around four tomorrow morning. At that time the canvas will be on the flatcars, with the show train moving. The speed of the train'll fan the flames, and maybe burn everything on the flats behind the canvas wagons.

"With luck the show'll be ruined. But there isn't a living thing behind the canvas on that train—animal or human—until you get to the caboose. Get it, punk?"

WITH relief Jorgenson got it. Of course Curly Summers wouldn't let Brady or anybody else burn a man or a beast to death. And this brilliant plan to avoid just that. It could consume most of the equipment of the Young-Burnham show without singeing the hair of a monkey's hide. The animals were all up ahead of the canvas on the train.

Curly Summers, he had to admit, was not only a tough showman but a smart one. He looked to be a cinch to beat Young-Burnham to its knees.

Brady's flat voice cut through Jorgenson's dull thoughts.

"So remember from now on, you do what you're told!"

Rick Jorgenson's temper flared savagely.

"And just who are you?" he snarled. "Now that you bring it up, I ain't seen any letter from Curly Summers."

Jorgenson's flow of speech stopped abruptly as it had started. He was gazing at a card in Brady's hand, which read:

THE KRAG BRADY ORGANIZATION
PRIVATE DETECTIVES
Industrial Guards and Operatives

Along the lower edge of the card were four addresses in New York, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Chicago.

For some reason Brady felt moved to

enlighten the roustabout.

"Circuses ain't exactly in our line," he said. "When there's a strike, say, in a factory we guard the plant and beat up the strikers. Just the spot for a gorilla like you, Mister, with a club to play with and maybe, once in a while, something with a little more authority."

"Me?" Jorgenson repeated dully. "I already got a job for the winter."

"Oh, yeah?" Brady smiled thinly. "You also killed a man. So you'll take my job, punk. I'll know you'll play level with me—because you gotta!"

With those fateful words Rick Jorgenson knew that at long last the pincers which had been slowly closing on him ever since his boyhood in the coal mines had snapped shut. There was no escape from the vengeful fate which had dogged him since the beginning of memory.

All this hateful summer he had lived by the light of one gleam hope. Ironically, Young-Burnham was responsible for it. Jorgenson had been promised the job of taking care of the horse stalls at winter quarters. His days as a spy and saboteur for the Summers show would be over. He could be around the animals he loved and understood, and which seemed to be the only living things that loved and understood Jorgenson. Also he could save up some money, get his teeth fixed, maybe, and a good suit of clothes. Perhaps it might even work into a permanent job, winter and summer, around circus horses.

Now Jorgenson was doomed to be a professional plug ugly, hoodlum, spy—anything this sinister snake of a man wanted him to be.

"Okay," he mumbled.

Because Jorgenson's whole life had been a lesson in pain, he shrugged resignedly.

"So Curly hired yuh to put this outfit on the Fritz, huh?" he asked Krag.

"Right. Curly Summers is my boss, and the Big Three Company runs him. We're not stopping until this outfit is bought up by the Big Three."

AS BRADY talked he was adjusting a small screw on the side of the slim metal container. Then he handed it to Jorgenson.

"Remember, punk," he said. "I'll know whether you've obeyed orders, see?"

Jorgenson nodded.

"You ain't the only man I've got on this show. I'll be seeing you from time

Fire gushed out as Jorgenson drove the wagon along the road

to time. Sew this thing-a-majig in the menagerie canvas between the matinee and evening shows."

There was neither emphasis, nor heat in his voice. Then he strolled off the lot.

Jorgenson's gray eyes followed the erect figure of the unemotional dealer in violence and murder for profit. He had recognized Krag Brady as the toughest man he had ever known.

Jorgenson went to the pad room. Here he helped wipe down the beautiful ring stock — three troupes of perfectly matched thoroughbreds, and dozens of beautiful high school and jumping horses of all degrees of training. Ministering to them was not a part of his duties as canvasman. It was a labor of love which had helped keep him sane that summer.

At last he could postpone the task Brady had set him no longer. Most of the show members were eating in the cook tent. Only one animal man was on duty in the menagerie, and he was reading a funny paper. Might be Brady's spy, for all Rick Jorgenson knew.

wise massage the canvas.

Shielded by Sultan it was the work of less than a minute for Jorgenson to add a new patch to the collection, with the incendiary bomb tucked beneath it. After that Jorgenson sidled into the cook tent and ate, wishing he were dead.

Then he helped to tear down cook tent, blacksmith top, horse tents and other portions of the show while the night crowd streamed down the midway and the side show band "smacked it" right merrily. Not for Jorgenson, now or ever, any part of the crowds and excitement and color of a show. He was a skulking wraith, shunned by the human beings who were his enemies.

Occasionally he broke out in a sweat at the thought of the bomb igniting prematurely. He did not really relax until the first half of the show was over, the animal cages on their way to the runs, and the bulls out of the menagerie top so the tent could be hauled down.

The second half of the big top performance was in full swing as the menagerie came floating to the ground. Can-

Next Issue's Novel: FRAME FOR MURDER, by HENRY KUTTNER

At the stake and chain wagon he opened the sailmaker's chest, and took from it heavy needle, thread, and a small square of canvas. With these materials in the pockets of his shockingly dirty denim pants, he walked into the menagerie tent through the backyard entrance.

On the big top side of the tent were arrayed the animal cages, and opposite them stood the majestic line of Young-Burnham's far-famed elephant herd.

Jorgenson slouched along between the massive posteriors of the bulls and the side wall of the tent. He stopped behind Sultan, huge oldster, although not leader of the herd. Herd leaders in the elephant world, as in the human affairs, are almost always female.

Behind Sultan the canvas had been patched repeatedly. In his old age Sultan had discovered that with certain things, such as stakes or chisels, or even some umbrellas snatched from customers, held in his trunk he could rip canvas. Now, if he could get hold of anything from a knife to a bull-hook he would joyfully turn his back to the crowd and merrily stroke, rip and other-

vasmen swarmed over it unlashing its sections and detaching them from the bailrings. Canvas and pole wagons rolled into place, teams and wagons threading their way through the debris of the teardown as accurately as a skater weaving through obstacles on the ice.

OLD Gimp Skelly's picture team—eight superb beasts—drew a canvas wagon into place alongside the Big Top wall. Bow-legged little Skelly lashed his reins around the brakewheel and then climbed down to idle away the ten minutes.

Jorgenson himself helped load the section of canvas which concealed the incendiary. Soon it was hidden below neat bundles. Two more rolls to stow away, and the job would be done. Jorgenson stopped to pat one of the leaders. Gimp Skelly was handling a lump of sugar to the other one.

Then, hand on the rump of the horse, Jorgenson froze with horror.

Three wisps of smoke curled lazily from the loaded canvas. Next came the crackle of flames, as the smoke thickened to a cloud. Pandemonium followed!

CHAPTER II

Test of Courage

THEN in the bedlam made up of everything from the blare of the circus band to the hysterical shouts of circus men, for a few moments, Jorgenson was the only one who did not move. In that interval he could see as clearly as though it was happening, a great rolling bonfire drawn by panic-stricken horses raging through the show grounds. He could see them trampling the midway crowd, setting fire to the canvas of the Big Top and the side show, and careening their awful way through hundreds of parked cars clogging every street around the lot.

Then things happened after that. Neighs like screams came from the throats of all eight horses, and as one they lunged against their collars. Flames roared from the surface of the load —and the Big Top, dry as tinder, was only three feet away. Old Gimp Skelly was hurled aside.

Jorgenson leaped for the wagon and swung himself to the lofty driver's platform in front of that inferno of flame and smoke. As eight wild horses dashed straight for the midway he got the reins in his hands. He forced himself to grasp them methodically—those for the leaders between thumb and forefinger, the other sets between fingers until the wheelers were handled by little and third fingers.

By that time the fantastically terrible cavalcade was careening down the midway like an apparition from another world.

Eight maddened horses, ears back, mouths open, bellies low to the ground, and screaming as only horses can scream in a fire, ran as though possessed. Behind them great crimson streamers of fire trailed from the gaudy red wagon.

And high above it all, stripped to the waist, half stood and half sat what might have been a god of the fire. Baking instead of burning, because the flames were blown backward by the speed of the wagon, Rick Jorgenson leaned a little forward, balancing himself on widespread legs, striving to telegraph to those crazed horses the knowledge that they were not alone.

Because of months of communion with them, he did it. They answered the reins. Awed spectators watched them miss a fallen child by a foot, and turn at a forty-five degree angle to thunder between side show guy ropes and a refreshment stand. Ten tons of wagon and horse roared across a narrow space and turned into the parking lot.

With less than five feet of clearance between the two rows of parked cars, Jorgenson guided the screaming team through the lot without touching a bumper. Out on the street he took a half turn, then an opposite half turn—and they were speeding down a side street.

From somewhere fire sirens wailed. Terrified motorists rushed to escape, and traffic officers ran for their lives.

Jorgenson's whole world consisted of the road ahead and the horses below him. Twice more the panic-stricken animals answered the reins—once to make a thirty-degree turn where the street branched off, and again to hurtle over a curb and the sidewalk, across a vacant lot, and into another side street of the little West Virginia city.

Soon that perambulating inferno of pain and fire and fear was thundering down a road on the outskirts of town, past widely spaced little houses set back from the highway.

Only then did Rick Jorgenson with a straight road before him, become aware simultaneously of overwhelming pain, and, simultaneously, of disaster close ahead. The wagon itself was burning now, and the seat against which he leaned was smoldering.

Through reddened, smoke-tortured eyes, he saw a narrow wooden bridge in front. From long experience he knew such small wooden bridges collapse under a ten-ton load—and this load would hit it at great speed. It was a half mile ahead. There awaited a nightmare—burning wagon falling into whatever depression the bridge spanned, crippled horses pinned to it while they burned to death!

That vision vitalized him.

He leaped down to the great wagon tongue and steadied himself

on the straining, lathered backs of the sobbing wheelers. Getting his balance, he put an open jackknife between his teeth. Forgetful of the pain of raw red hands, blistered feet and a back that was already a second-degree burn, he started unbuckling and unhooking and unstrapping—and when necessary—slashing the leather with his knife.

He had gone through torture to save these horses, and save them he would.

His actions were swift and sure. He balanced himself on his heaving perch with the skill of a lifetime of assorted physical training, steadying himself occasionally on a hot and heaving gray back. With the fire sirens wailing closer behind him, and disaster close ahead, he tore and slashed at the recalcitrant leather.

The wheelers broke free. Then the second team went raging away from the horror behind them. Now the tongue was flapping dangerously, and the release of the third team took longer.

The bridge was only a few hundred yards away as the third team dashed off to both sides of the wagon. The tip of the wagon tongue, upheld only by the leaders, was within a foot of the ground. With rolling eyes, constantly showing white, of the kings of a royal team were begging Jorgenson to save them—Jorgenson who could barely stay on the vibrating shaft of timber which was his platform.

He gathered himself at the tip of the pole. Clinging to the off-leader, he released the chain which bound the horse to the cross piece of the wagon tongue. Barely in time, he threw himself toward the near leader, getting a grip on the collar as the off one galloped aside. With luck he might liberate the last horse, and cling to it until it carried him clear.

But that was not to be.

While he was still hacking at the last strand of leather, it parted. The end of the tongue hit the ground and then bounced upward. It catapulted Jorgenson back against the front of the wagon.

Something sharp drove straight through his cheek and red hot metal dragged a bloody trail down his face. The burning wagon seared a last brand on him as he fell. His head banged hard against the turning wheel and he felt himself being hurled through the air. Then, mercifully, he knew no more.

Nor did he know anything much for the next four weeks. During that period six operations were performed on him, ranging from digging out all his upper teeth to complicated maneuvering around his eyes. This and other things were done by a specialist who had been imported from Chicago.

For a solid month he lived in a fog of agony, morphia, and intermittent delirium. Time after time he was anaesthetized, and when he came to there was new pain in his face and limbs. His eyes were bandaged. His body was trussed like a mummy. His left forearm and right leg were in splints, and he breathed and was fed through small openings in the mask of cotton and gauze.

But Jorgenson didn't care if he never got well. He hoped the bandages would never come off his face. That pan of his must really be a lulu now. They were making a plate to replace his upper teeth so he could eat, at least. Even Krag Brady's plug-ugly has to eat.

Then there came a day of new strength. That evening they took the bandages off his eyes, and allowed him to look around the neat hospital room for an hour, in the late afternoon.

And next morning the head of the hospital came into the room. He had a booming voice and Jorgenson surmised who he was at once. Dr. Carson had learned much from Jorgenson's delirious raving, and the surgeon liked to heal mental as well as physical ills.

"Well, son, we've pulled you through and you'll be as good as new and maybe better," he told the canvasman. "Mr. Young and Mr. Burnham said to spare no expense, and we haven't. We feel as though you were a member of the family, because that was a great thing you did. Saved hundreds of lives, and the whole world knows it!"

JORGENSON turned away wearily. He had put out a fire to save Gimp Skelly's team. He hadn't thought much about the human beings.

"And today's the day we take off your bandages. How are the false teeth? Used to them by now?"

"They're okay," Rick Jorgenson mumbled.

First they took the bandage from his eyes. He saw there were half a dozen nurses bustling around the room. Dr.

Carson turned out to be a huge man whose rounded shoulders and shaggy, low-held head made him look like a kindly buffalo. Carson himself unwound the bandages from Jorgenson's face. Now four other nurses were huddling in the doorway. Jorgenson's hands were still bound up in gauze and tape, so that he could not feel his newly bared features. Those nurses were quiet and acting funny.

"Somebody bring a mirror!" roared Carson.

As he spoke, the stout old Superintendent of Nurses herself came sailing majestically through the door, carrying a large square looking glass.

Suddenly Rick Jorgenson's heart was pounding. There was a sense of suffocation around his heart. Carson handed him the mirror.

"Not bad, eh?" he said.

Then, with unscientific sentimentality he watched the climax which he had staged with all the care of a director fashioning the big scene of a show.

For a breathless few seconds Rick Jorgenson stared at himself. Amid utter silence he turned his head away, and then looked again. Slowly his lower jaw sagged, revealing his own clean lower teeth and the shining artificial ones above. This made him blink rapidly and gulp a few times.

The movements of his mouth and eyes had convinced him that it was really himself he saw. The mirror dropped from his still bandaged hands. Then, motionless, he stared at the opposite wall.

Every one of those nurses had laboriously thought up a wisecrack for the occasion, but no one said a word. They couldn't, when they saw the glory in Jorgenson's eyes. Gleams of light had appeared in them, and spread and warmed into a blinding radiance.

Then frantically he snatched up the mirror, and drank himself in again!

What he saw was only a pleasant, ruggedly comely face, but to Rick Jorgenson it was that of a god. The growth was gone from his cheek, the scarred tissue had been removed, and the livid cut which had drawn down the lower lid of one eye had vanished. The twisted and flattened nose had become an appendage which somehow blended harmoniously with the square jaw and somewhat heavy chin. The cauliflowers had been removed from his ears, which had lost their striking resemblance to the handles of a jug. Even his disfigured lips had been reshaped.

"After we have sun bathed you a few weeks all of those tiny little knife marks will disappear," Dr. Carson said.

The nurses appeared in danger of collapsing under the strain of their repressed excitement, so the doctor beckoned to them, and led the way out the door.

Rick Jorgenson buried his head in the pillows. Before the door had closed his big body was racked with sobs. His entire being was shaken by the force of that released volcano of feeling. Minute after minute went by while the psychological poison of a whole horrible lifetime flowed out of him in a torrent of the first tears he had shed since babyhood.

A half hour later, up on the sun porch of the hospital in skimpy trunks, he was opening the first of two letters which had been held for two days until he could read them himself. Drunk with happiness, he scanned the first:

Friend Rick,

Beauty and Spot and Carrie and the rest of the team wonder when you are comin back. They won't never forget how you drove them that night. The ballet gals are wonderin', too. We herd the boss hired a sawbones to fix you over into a hansum Harry. No foolin it was a great thing you done and all the fellers in the show are for you now.

The Summers show is still givin it to us hot and heavy. Our billpostin' crew is out on bail in eight diffrunt towns because of fights. Our show is worried because Big Three is Big Three, and Summers show seems to be winnin out. Big Three wants to buy us because we got Rolph Burnham the greatest animal trainer in the world.

After the fire the boss retired Casey and Pearl to a farm because their tails got burnt off and I had to go to Wisconsin to buy two new wheelers. Mighty fine lookers.

Respectfully,
Jebediah Skelly.

RICK JORGENSON winced several times as he read the references to himself and the show. Then he set his jaw. He'd repay his debt somehow, and then he'd go to Astor City and surrender to the police. With his new face he might get away with a plea of manslaughter, and only have to serve a year or so in prison: Life was wonderful. There was something wrong if a guy had his health and a good face and didn't think life was wonderful.

As he opened the plain envelope postmarked Chicago a hundred-dollar bill fell to the floor. Jorgenson put his foot on it to keep it from blowing away, and stared at the signature—typewritten, like the note:

Hello, Punk:—

Enclosed is a bonus from you know who. Understand the bandages come off this week, so I'll drop over and see you in a few days. You'll be more valuable than ever now, and I'm looking forward to talking over the old days in Astor City.

Yours, Brady.

For a full five minutes, the money hidden by his foot, Jorgenson stared over the misty West Virginia mountains. Then he picked up the bill, put on the fleecy brown bathrobe which was one of innumerable little comforts bought for him with Young-Burnham's money, and went downstairs. He asked for a phone to be plugged into his room, and two minutes later was talking to the Chief of Police of the tough mining town of Astor City, Colorado. Having ascertained that the Chief had been serving in that same capacity three years before, Rick said steadily:

"I understand yuh want a canvasman of the Young-Burnham Circus for killin' a man named Biff Haskell in a fight on the lot three years ago."

"Who told yuh that? Biff Haskell's in jail right now within a hundred feet of me for drunk drivin'!"

The events of that day having put Jorgenson in a condition where miracles were commonplace, he was able to speak promptly.

"But—but I'm the guy yuh wanted."

"The devil yuh says," grated the Chief without interest. "I remember now. Haskell got smacked so hard he was in a coma from concussion and we figgered he'd kick the bucket. But he didn't and that's that, and is there anything else I can do for yuh?"

"Mister, not a thing," Jorgenson breathed. Then, frantically: "Wait a minute—don't hang up! Has anybody asked about the case lately except me?"

"Shore. Got a letter about it a couple of months ago."

"Was the man's name Brady?"

"Gosh, how should I remember? I kind of think he was a private detective of some kind."

"Thanks!"

CHAPTER III

Circus Feud

RICK JORGENSON hung up and set the phone on the table. Perhaps Curly Summers had not known that Biff Haskell had recovered until Krag Brady had checked up in Astor City. But for two months, at least, those two had deliberately held him in bondage.

He leaped to his feet, and started pacing the floor in such a madness of raging fury that it took the shattering of a water glass he knocked over to bring him to his senses. Then a wave of physical weakness forced him to get into bed. Nevertheless, Jorgenson was thankful for his lack of strength when Krag Brady, unannounced, strolled into his room the next afternoon. Had he been strong, he might have killed Brady then and there.

"Hello, punk—or should I say Robert Taylor?" Brady said with his thin smile.

In light tweeds, carrying topcoat and gray felt hat, he was entirely at ease. His thinnish brown hair was parted in the middle. His hatchet face had a mocking expression.

Jorgenson merely stared at him. Some day his fingers were going to get a big treat—when they closed around that long, thin neck.

Then he pulled himself together. But he couldn't speak yet.

"Same gorilla, but a new kisser," jibed Brady as he perched himself on the foot of the bed. "I can use you anywhere, now. You got a great career ahead of you, punk."

"If I get paid for it I have, and don't call me punk."

"Well listen to the punk," Brady said, without feeling. That was what helped make the man so appallingly sinister—his seeming lack of emotion. Like a swaying snake he leaned forward.

"Don't let your face go to your head, punk," he continued. "It would only take two of my boys a couple of minutes to turn that new map into something that would make your old one look like a collar ad. Before we shipped you to Astor City. Understand?"

"I understand," Rick Jorgenson said with difficulty.

"Good. Now, listen. We've changed plans. No more fighting with billboard crews. We were going to start playing day-and-date with Young Burnham. Not no more—except just one day, in one town. That day we'll finish off Young, and Curly Summers can buy it in for a song. You'll be a big shot around Young-Burnham when you get back—and your part in that day will be important."

"Doing what?"

"What you're told—which we're not telling you now. You might tip our mitt, unconscious like. A new kisser don't make you any the less stupid. I come up to look you over, and remind you that you're still working for me. So long, punk."

Then without a single backward look, Krag Brady picked up his belongings and left the room.

Unerringly he had put his finger on the one threat in all the world which could affect Rick Jorgenson. Vaguely Jorgenson realized he was as fearful of an accident to his appearance now as he had been of the police of Astor City. Oh, the irony of it!

And because he was afraid, and because he had set himself an impossible standard of perfection in the conduct of his future life, he worked all evening on a letter to Crowney Young. Slowly and with the difficulty of the habitually inarticulate, he poured out the whole story of the past, and promises and suggestions for the future.

THEN he got a stamp from a nurse, looked up the route card of the show and mailed it to Devens, Texas.

Six days later the wire arrived:

EXPECT YOU TO JOIN IN RANSDALE WILL WIRE CARFARE TOMORROW

Seventy-two hours afterward, heart pounding and throat dry, he was rounding the backyard fence on his way to the stake and chain wagon.

Crowney Young and three other top bosses had been away, ironing out a license difficulty in the next day's stand, so the next four hours on the lot to Rick had been unalloyed bliss. Magically he had found himself really a part of the show. There had been unsentimental kidding, hand-shaking and horseplay from the great and small of the outfit, and Chimp O'Grady had done three unheard of things for a boss canvasman. He had taken a drink during working hours, and allowed a roustabout to have a drink on the lot. Furthermore, he had joined the said roustabout in taking the said drink.

The stars had smiled at him from the big top rings during the matinee, and he had eaten supper at the bosses' table. Later Gimp Skelly had treated him like a son and an equal as they stood in the horse tent. Together they had gazed with simple pleasure at the haunches of the new wheelers.

But the crowning wonder of all was that his new face had made him feel like part of the human race.

Then Rick Jorgenson walked around the red-and-gold stake and chain wagon, and stopped at the edge of the canopy. It was not for ordinary employees to enter the lot office of the show without permission.

At the sight of him, long, gangly young Crowney Young, descendant of four generations of circus Youngs, uncoiled from his deck chair. He beckoned Jorgenson to enter, and shook hands. Jake Irons, the Young-Burnham legal adjuster, was there, too, and also shook hands.

"You look fine," Young said, but Jorgenson noticed he had grown haggard, and hollow-eyed. "As for your letter—I don't know what I'd do with a murder rap hanging over me, so I won't judge you. But if anybody'd done for me what the show's done for you, I'd be loyal. So we'll assume you're on our side."

"I'll do anything!"

"Take it easy."

"Brady came to see me a few days ago."

As he told the brief tale of Brady's mysterious predictions of things to come old man Irons got to his feet and walked up and down, fanning himself with his leghorn hat. When Jorgenson had finished the leonine old lawyer snorted.

"I've been in the show business for fifty years, but this is the first time I ever heard of a show hirin' professional strong men to do their dirty work for 'em. Curly Young and the Big Three must be bad off."

"As I live and breathe," Young half-whispered, "Here is Curly himself!"

"Beat it around the wagon, but listen in," Irons rumbled to Jorgenson, wiping his bald head furiously.

Jorgenson knew that Summers had seen him, but it was natural that an ordinary canvasman be dismissed when business was being done at the sign of the stake and chain. Jorgenson took a position in the shadow of the wagon.

Fat Curly Young was a human behemoth whose hard, alert eyes were set in a smooth and lineless face. He had the jowls of a mastiff and a craggy rock of a chin.

Neither side wasted time on hypocritical amenities. Summers stopped at the edge of the canvas canopy, and planted himself on widespread legs.

"The offer I made you at the start of the season still goes. Crowney." Summers' voice had the deep rasp which comes from a lifetime of shouting in the open air.

"And my answer still goes—double," Crowney shot back.

that the second greatest outdoor showman of modern times walked away like an ambulatory Gibraltar.

Acting on an obscure impulse, Rick Jorgenson leaped to his feet and followed him. Then, in the crowd before a Midway refreshment booth, he saw Krag Brady join Summers. They talked briefly. Then Summers walked on toward the sideshow, and Brady turned toward the busy front door of the Big Top. The show was just starting, and late-comers were swarming in.

Brady saw Jorgenson over the heads of the crowd. He smiled thinly, and walked forward.

"Hello, punk," he said. "Looking for you. Take me somewhere where we can talk."

Jorgenson steered him into the deserted back lot. "How did you know I was out?" asked the canvasman.

"I got ways. That was an awful long letter you wrote Crowney Young, too."

Again a feeling of panic swept over

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"There ain't room enough on the road for us both," Summers said mildly. "Even if you succeed in gettin' together a *new* show next season."

Old man Irons snorted loudly. Then Summers proceeded.

"I'm prepared to play you day-and-date from the openin' day, cut prices, take my losses and run you off the road for keeps—no deals."

"And I suppose Big Jim Grogan agrees with you?" Irons asked.

"He's retirin'."

"Still owns a majority of the Big Three stock, doesn't he?"

"But I'm the boss."

"Six of our special bill-posting crew had legs or arms broken in Keyport last week," Crowney Young murmured.

"Accidents will happen," Summers answered.

"Even if we were disposed to make a deal, accidents like that would change our minds," Crowney Young said.

"Meaning you're fightin' it out?"

"Meaning we're fighting it out. Is that all you've got to say?"

"That's all," said Summers. And with

Jorgenson. Something about the human cobra beside him aroused a fear which was nothing less than atavistic.

"I had plenty to say," he muttered with an effort. "I had to thank 'em."

"Thank nothing. You saved their whole show, and they spent a few bucks on you. Don't feel too grateful."

They had stopped beside a stand of trees, just back of where the horse tents had been. The combined noises of the performance in the Big Top and preliminary loading of horse tent, blacksmith top, and other minor equipment made it necessary for Brady to raise his voice a trifle.

"The blow-off's tomorrow in Yount City," he said.

"Yount City! Summers is way over in Arkansas."

"But they're playing Yount City tomorrow."

"But our twenty-four-hour man hasn't said anything."

"Your twenty-four-hour man, punk, won't say anything for a couple of days."

Jorgenson was stuttering with the shock of it.

"But—but why Yount City?"

"Because Big Jim Grogan's son-in-law owns a hundred-thousand-acre ranch and half the town and runs it and we won't get in any trouble. You got two things to do."

JORGENSON pulled himself together. He must learn all he could.

"I'm listening," he said.

"Talking as fancy as your new face, eh?" Brady said with that expressionless mockery. "All right, listen. Tomorrow you'll be slipped a box full of mice—maybe rats. At the right time, meaning when one of my men gives the office, you release 'em in front of the elephants and see that they stampede. Understand?"

"I understand."

"Then, when the fight starts, you stampede the horses in the pad room and the work horses in the horse tents. I want 'em spread all over the countryside. Understand?"

Jorgenson nodded slowly, too stunned for speech. "And listen, punk."

Suddenly Brady's little agates of eyes held a dull glow, like two pinpoints of fire obscured by dark smoke.

"I'm getting a twenty-five grand bonus if everything goes right. So what you're to do will go right—understand? If it don't, right on the lot in front of everybody you're going to wish you'd never been born—before you're shipped to Astor City!"

What Jorgenson did then was reflex action. In Krag Brady was crystallized all the agony and persecution of the past, plus the dreadful ordeal starting in Yount City and ending, for Rick Jorgenson, no one knew where.

Jorgenson's fist shot out. It thudded against Brady's jaw with all the weight of his superb body behind it. Brady staggered. Jorgenson's right followed like a bolt of lightning to the detective's knife-like nose. With savage delight Jorgenson felt flesh and gristle and bone squash flat against his fist, and the feel of the spurting blood was soothing on the flesh of his hand. Sharp teeth raked across his knuckles and drew blood.

Quite slowly Brady's body started to crumple forward. Before it folded completely, Jorgenson's left sank to the wrist in the hoodlum's belly. Then Brady collapsed and lay still.

CHAPTER IV

Big Top Peril

LUCKILY, at the time, the two men were in the shadow of the clump of trees. No one was nearby, and the quick, deadly encounter had been unobserved. Breathing hard, Jorgenson stood alongside his unconscious Nemesis like a lion above his kill. Pounding pulses sent a hundred thoughts racing through his brain. Had he spilled the beans or helped save the show? Confused and uncertain, he paced up and down beside the still form of Krag Brady.

In a surprisingly short time Brady stirred. Weakly he swayed to a sitting position. Blood was gushing down over his chest. Rick Jorgenson stood above him.

"When yuh mentioned Astor City I couldn't help it," he explained. Then he lied. "I'm still workin' for you, but I won't stand no more ribbin' about that rap!"

He did not notice that his speech had relapsed into its old sloppiness. The man on the ground groaned.

"Better get to a doctor," Jorgenson told Brady, and walked away.

Behind him, Brady started to retch.

Jorgenson was thinking clearly now. The Summers gang, of course, thought that he was still in mortal fear of the Astor City police. His hitting Brady did not necessarily mean that he was not still their man. Nothing would stop them from going through with their Yount City campaign. The location was perfect, there was little if any risk, preparations were all made and a fortune was at stake.

He found a council of war at the stake and chain wagon. Crowney Young, Irons, Chimp O'Grady, the lot superintendent and four assistant bosses, had gathered to confer.

Jorgenson told what had happened. "Maybe you better not play Yount City, Mr. Young," he suggested.

"A Young show was never scared out of a date yet," snapped the owner. "And what a perfect setup they think it is. Animals stampeding all over the coun-

tryside, and a million dollars worth of phony suits for damages against us."

"Under cover of the stampede, they rip our show apart," growled Irons. "Then Curly Summers makes an offer for the remains, and takes over the damage suits Grogan's son-in-law's friends have started against us."

"Anything we do will be wrong for the local cops," Chimp O'Grady put in. "And Brady's strong arm men can break our heads without fear."

"With Rick's help, maybe we can make out," Crowney Young said. "But Krag Brady will never let you get away with that broken nose, Rick."

"They won't start taking him apart until after he's done his dirty work," Irons pointed out. "Then they'll gang up on him."

"So you must disappear tomorrow before anything starts," said Young.

"But stick around to the last minute so that they'll think you're going to stampede the stock," interrupted Irons. "We'll arrange for you to disappear at the right time, Rick."

"Not by the hair of your chinny chin chin!" retorted the canvasman.

The surprised bosses studied Jorgenson.

"What I mean," Rick Jorgenson floundered on with sudden self-consciousness, "is that if you've got sand enough to go through with Yount City, I've got sand enough to—to stick around and see it through."

It was as though the air under the canopy had been at high pressure. Jorgenson's courage reassured the showmen. They relaxed.

"We gotta get the show tore down," Chimp O'Grady reminded them. "We can talk in the pie car later. Come on, kid."

And with the words he gave Rick Jorgenson a mighty thump on the back, and carried him off to help tear down. And suddenly Jorgenson realized he had stepped from the broken shell of the past. Never again would he be a creature of fear.

BUT gradually, during a sleepless rainy night his exultation died. His spirit chilled as the rain increased. The temperature became more bitter with every mile the show train drove toward Yount City. When Jorgenson tumbled off beside the cars at five thirty, the weather was gray and dankly cold—a norther, from all indications.

He arrived at the lot in a compact little army of watchful canvasmen and found Krag Brady already there. Down to the last boss and kinker, the rest of the show would be on the ground within a few minutes.

The enemy was alert and waiting.

Idling around the lot were more than a hundred men. Most of them were battered and all of them were big. They were as out of place in a north Texas town as they would be in place around the stockyards of Chicago. Among them, but a little apart, stood Krag Brady. Adhesive tape made a white smear of his face.

Jorgenson forced himself to walk to the edge of the lot, alone. He was conscious that a full half of Brady's men were eyeing him. His heart sank.

He braced himself as Brady drifted casually toward him. There was no hint of expression in Brady's small eyes as he spoke from the corner of his mouth.

"Summers'll be in in a few minutes. My kid brother will be at the show tonight to see that you don't double-cross me. He'll hand you the mice."

That was all. Brady did not even pause in his apparently casual stroll past Jorgenson.

Then an electric thrill went through Jorgenson, and Brady stopped in his tracks as Chimp O'Grady's bellow boomed across the lot. He was waving a piece of paper in his hand.

"Summers hit a washout on the line and won't be in before eleven! We start our matinee at twelve. They can't be up before four, so shake it up!"

His four assistants took up the refrain, and Jorgenson rushed back to his job of unloading canvas. The show started with almost incredible speed amid rising wind and falling thermometer. It was going to be a norther sure enough, but a growing crowd was watching the buildup and O'Grady yelled that they were sending wagons all over town advertising the early matinee. Feud or no feud, by some miracle they might do a good show that afternoon.

And do a good show they did, despite the fact that the weather should have prevented anyone from patronizing the

greatest show on earth. Scattered in the audience were Brady's men. A quarter of a mile away, separated from the Young-Burnham lot by a huge pasture, the Summers show was going up. Brady had been absent since its arrival, and no further word had come to Jorgenson.

Jorgenson found himself standing alongside Chimp O'Grady just inside the rear door of the Big Top. Behind them, in the center of the backyard, great pots of coffee stood alongside a bonfire to provide some comfort for the shivering performers and ring men. A heavy mist had drifted in on the wings of a paralyzing wind.

"Wonder why the gorillas are in the audience?" Jorgenson asked.

"Fight'll start tonight," said the boss canvasman. "It's lookin' over the land they are, and tonight they'll figure to use the stampedes to help panic the crowd. Nightime will make everything more confusin'."

Then he squinted up at the big top. The canvas around the Number Four center pole was sagging heavily.

"What's goin' on here?" he muttered, and Jorgenson followed him at a half run as the stocky boss ducked under the backyard wall to look at the big top in perspective.

Little time it took to see what was happening. That mist was freezing on whatever it touched. A coating of ice was becoming thicker and heavier on the outer canvas. The body heat of the crowd was sufficient to keep the interior of the vast tent from icing up.

Without a word O'Grady ran for the stake and chain wagon, with Jorgenson behind him. While he was still a hundred feet away the boss began to yell.

"Crowney, we gotta to get rid of the crowd and yank the show down while we can still work. Look!"

HIS words were interrupted by a series of loud explosive crackles. The canvas around the Number Four pole slid halfway down the pole, until the whole top was sagging at that end. Then, while two hundred circus men stood as if hypnotized, there was a series of cracks like pistol shots. The slipping fall guys had broken on Number Four pole, and then the fall guys and guy ropes on the other three poles snapped.

(*Continued on page 87*)

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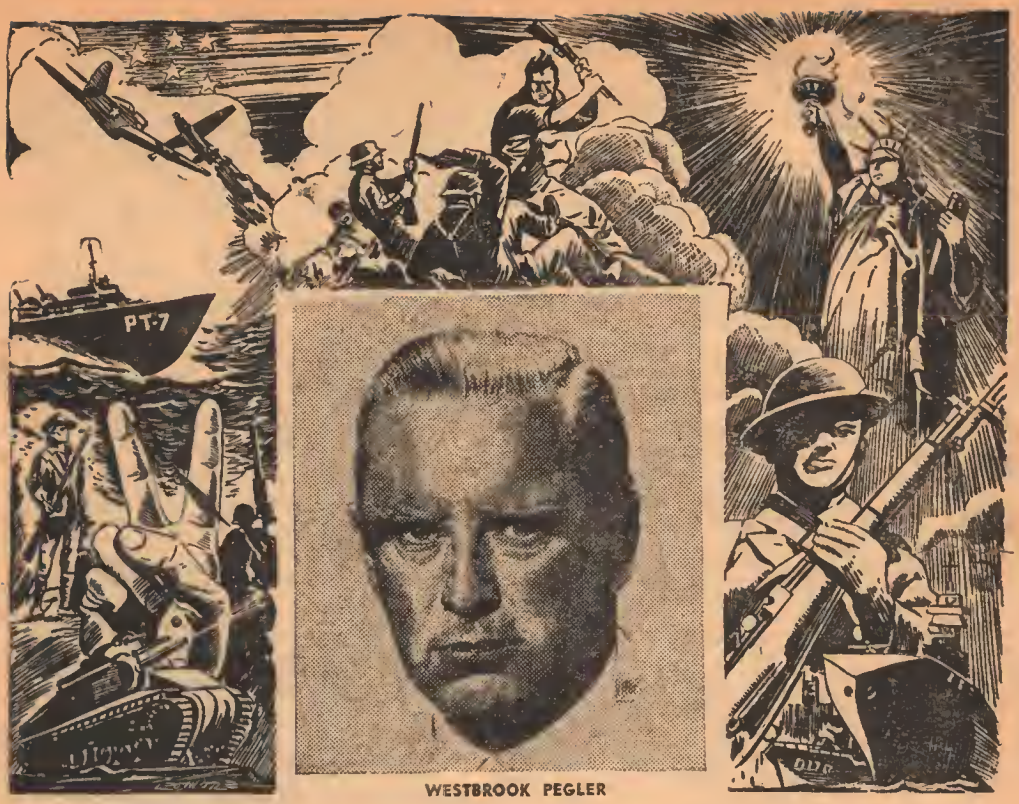

WESTBROOK PEGLER

Straight to the Bottom

By WESTBROOK PEGLER

World-Famous Newspaper Columnist

IT CAN'T be true that the American people have to be talked into buying War Bonds. The people don't quibble about interest rates or question the security of the investment but most of us have never regarded ourselves as important investors and never study investment as financiers do. We are savers, but ordinarily we save in pig banks and savings accounts or through insurance. It is hard to realize that old Sam could make use of as little as $18.75 when a tank costs X-thousands and, for years, we have been reading of appropriations of millions.

The late Jack Curley, the promoter of wrestling exhibitions, some of which were mockeries, but better than the grimmer endeavors of the great hairy, sweaty bodies in his employ, told a sad story of the end of an imported performer known as the Terrible Turk.

The Terrible Turk had made a great fortune wrestling in the United States and converted it into gold coin and started home.

But, at sea, the ship caught fire and burned and the Turk was safe in a lifeboat which was about to lower away, when temptation overcame him. He ran back to his stateroom, strapped on his money belt and staggered again to his lifeboat station to discover the boat already in the water and drawing away.

Mr. Curley's Terrible Turk climbed the rail, leaped for the boat, missed it by yards and sank like an anvil.

This unhappy experience seems appropriate to the day's lesson. If Hitler and Tojo win this war all of us go straight to the bottom where the money can't buy anything.

The common idea is that these bonds back the soldiers. That is true, but it is truer and more to the point, that the fighting men are backing up the bonds, staking their lives to protect these investments

THE BIG-TOP MYSTERY

(*Continued from page* 85)

Tons of ice weighted canvas slid downward to trap the thousands of spectators below.

As Rick Jorgenson ran blindly toward the billowing sea of canvas, he saw the bulls stampede through the sidewall of the menagerie tent. Six lions, mad with the fear of being outside their accustomed cages, cowered and roared under wagons. At the time when the male lion act was returning to its cages, a quarter pole had broken apart two sections of the wooden runway through which the animals entered the arena.

Rick Jorgenson stopped short as a thought struck him. Could Summers have sabotaged the show? Had somebody cut those guys?

It could not be. Grogan's own hometown people were under that heaving ocean of ice-covered canvas. But Krag Brady might have done anything.

In that bedlam of shrieking wind, amid the cries of hundreds of animals and thousands of human beings, with wild-eyed horses galloping in all directions and the elephants now a half mile away in full stampede, Rick Jorgenson forced himself to remain quiet for a few seconds, striving to discover what he might do to help. No sense in clawing blindly without some plan.

Then he saw the approach of the Summers army. Hundreds of men, their own show only half up, were streaming across the intervening pasture lot. Two dozen bulls, mahouts riding their heads, were going cross country, apparently in pursuit of the stampeding elephants. Dozens of other men were on horses, galloping on various errands.

Was it an attack or a reinforcement?

That seemed unimportant, somehow. Now the entire free personnel of Young-Burnham were working frantically around the edges of the big top to get people out. Animal men were herding

[*Turn page*]

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the lions with pieces of canvas to simulate their cages. Bleeding, disheveled, half naked people were struggling from under the edges of the canvas. Muffled shouts sounded beneath it, pleading for calmness in this emergency. No one need be hurt if they controlled themselves.

Then a rasping cry was wrenched from Jorgenson's lips.

One of the four great cables which anchored the kingpole to the ground had snapped. The next instant he realized that it was the guy anchored on the front-door Midway side—the one which prevented the Number One center pole from falling inward toward the center of the Big Top.

It was only a question of time before the teetering eighty-foot pole would sway inward, and there would be nothing to stop its hundreds of pounds from smashing down on that heaving sea of helpless, panic-stricken humanity.

Then, in the nick of time, he saw the boss hostler hurrying across the lot carrying a huge coil of rope. It was to be used to tie captured horses together. The boss hostler followed Jorgenson's shaking arm, pointing at the gently swaying kingpole. With a weak gasp of comprehension, he gave up the rope.

"Get Chimp and some men to pull," Jorgenson shouted.

Then, carrying the great coil of rope, he staggered and stumbled across the bodies beneath the icy canvas to the base of the pole.

He removed his shoes, and tied a great loop around both himself and the kingpole. Then he hurled the remaining coil toward the edge of the canvas. O'Grady and two dozen men were waiting there for it.

All realized what must be done. It would be impossible to shove the rope high enough up the pole in time to do any good. The mist, now so heavy and wet that it was like a soaking rain, had frozen to the windward side of the pole in a solid, ever-thickening sheet. But on the lee side the ice extended in protuberances of varying length and thickness, sculptured by the vagaries of the wind sweeping around the pole. It would require a specially prepared, thirty foot stick, with some sort of catchall on its tip holding the rope, to get the loop past those protuberances. Even then there would be no guarantee of success.

Using the everchanging platforms of

ice as footgrips, Jorgenson started up the pole, supporting the loop over one shoulder.

CHAPTER V

TEST OF A MAN

FRANTICALLY Rick Jorgenson began to climb. Before he had mounted fifteen feet his hands and feet were frozen. Suddenly the huge shaft began to sway inward. At the same instant Jorgenson shoved the loop he had tied around the pole, high above his head. Twenty men at the other end of the rope threw their weight into a pull. The line tightened. Although there was little leverage at such a height, the sway had been stopped in time.

Jorgenson took a long breath. He noticed that Krag Brady was one of the men on the rope. All around the edges of the vast Big Top he could see other Summers men working side by side with their enemies to extricate the smothering crowd beneath the canvas. Jorgenson also observed two bulges where men were evidently clearing a path between the base of the pole and the front door.

It was a job to loosen the loop again and shove it upward. Almost each horizontal icicle was a new problem, but foot by foot man and loop crawled upward. Jorgenson's legs were numb, now, and his feet without feeling as they sought for new footholds. To be certain of pulling the pole outward, or holding it

[*Turn page*]

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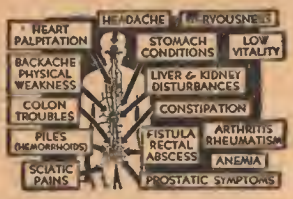

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against any real sway on the unsupported side, the loop should be almost halfway up — forty feet above the ground. Otherwise the leverage would be insufficient. The rope was comparatively short, and until it could be lengthened by the addition of another one, the manpower which could be applied to it was pitifully inadequate. Also the men had to work on very uncertain footing.

Chimp O'Grady was watching every move. He tightened the rope instantly whenever the teetering pole started to incline toward the center of the canvas. Icy gusts of wind were cutting Jorgenson's face, and now his feet were raw and bleeding, but without feeling. Steadily he worked the loop closer and closer to the halfway mark. His whole body ached with fatigue. Only the fact that his feet had reasonably good purchase on the protruding ice knobs kept him from sliding down the pole from exhaustion.

Nearly thirty feet above the ground he was forced to pause and rest. His breath came in great gasps, and it was hard to move any part of his body. But just a few feet further up lay success.

Slowly, with an effect of inevitability, the great shaft started to sway inward again. The wind had changed a little, and increased in power.

NOW for the first time Jorgenson realized that if the pole went, he would go down with it. He was too high to escape now. Strangely enough, he felt a curious exultation, rather than fear, because he knew that the past would rise to haunt him no more. However this situation came out, he was doing a man's work in the world that day. Crippled or whole, alive or dead, he could respect himself at last.

With a sort of serene fatalism, he felt the pole swing farther off center than it had ever gone before.

"By the great hornspoon, she's goin'," came Chimp O'Grady's anguished roar. "Pull, yuh spalpeens, pull!"

Rick Jorgenson's clothing was half-frozen to the pole as he hung there, plastered to the ice. Miraculously, his mind was clear. For some reason the scene, far below him, seemed to have little to do with him personally. The rope gang were pulling their hearts out, and now each man had two others pulling on him to help. Hundreds of others

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In his own case, he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as world-wide professional recognition. Thirty years ago he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back to England to die when a strange message came—"They are waiting for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there, under the guidance of the greatest mystic he ever encountered during his 21 years in the Far East. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power which there came to him.

Within 10 years he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the World's leading geographical societies for his work as a geographer. And today, 30 years later, he is still so athletic, capable of so much work, so young in appearance, it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

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had ceased their frantic toil to stand like statues of despair as the kingpole swayed majestically toward its Number Two brother. It might knock down the Number Two pole, Jorgenson thought, like a pair of ten pins falling.

Then, just as the mighty column of solid wood seemed due for a crushing fall, it slowed its downward progress. For a breathless five seconds it stayed poised above its potential victims. Then slowly, as the men below threw their last ounce of strength against the rope, it swung massively out toward the Midway.

For the next few seconds, Jorgenson was incapable of moving a muscle. Yet he should be sliding earthward over those growing stalactites of ice. Far away he caught a glimpse of the elephants on their way back toward the lot, and heard the noise of fire trucks and ambulances as they screamed down six different streets and roads toward the circus lot. From all sides of the fallen Big Top canvas men, women and children were crawling out slowly, like frozen ants barely able to move.

Then, like the crack of doom, came a crisp explosion above Rick's head. A

[*Turn page*]

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wire sang by him and writhed like a dying snake across the canvas below.

The guy wire which anchored the kingpole toward the center of the Big Top had broken.

And now, despite O'Grady and his men on the rope, the pole was hanging at a shallow angle off center, toward the Midway. Another anchor, which had kept it erect, was no more.

O'Grady's voice floated upward from far below:

"Ride her down, Rick! You gotta ride her down!"

And ride her down Rick Jorgenson did, mind still working with that superlative clarity, body without feeling. Perhaps he could use the tumbling ability he had learned in wrestling to leap from the pole at the last minute.

Body held away from the pole by stiff arms, bleeding feet with flapping tattered socks, he was a figure at once pitiful and magnificent as he slid down to what seemed certain destruction.

With fatalistic calm he gathered himself. The air rushed past him as the pole teetered further with ever-increasing speed. Ten feet above the ground, he launched himself into space.

A strangled cry burst from his throat as his feet slipped on the ice, and spoiled his takeoff. Vague figures danced below and beyond. Instead of a trained body in full control, a helpless mass of arms and legs went whirling toward the frozen ground.

Instinctively he threw up his arms to guard his face. As though in some nightmare he saw the blurred figure of a man loom in front of him. The stranger could have leaped out of the way. Instead, he planted himself firmly, and then his body gave beneath the terrific impact. Jorgenson cut the man down like a scythe, and the stranger was smashed flat.

Jorgenson, half-stunned, bounced off to the ground five feet further on. He rolled over twice, and finally came to a sitting position. The man who had saved him lay still.

Slowly and painfully Jorgenson flexed his muscles and moved his limbs. Nothing seemed to be broken. Then he felt his face. A few scratches—that was all.

A short distance off the kingpole was still quivering. As a dozen men rushed to him Jorgenson waved them away.

Chimp O'Grady gripped his shoulder hard, and then galloped after his men. Jorgenson crawled over to his rescuer just as the man came weakly to a sitting position.

It was Krag Brady, gasping for the air which had been knocked out of him.

Side by side they sat—Rick Jorgenson and Krag Brady, his bitter foe. Finally Brady recovered somewhat, and had the strength to readjust two strips of adhesive tape which had come loose on his broken nose.

"I called Astor City and got the truth," said Jorgenson, at last. "Just the same—thanks!"

"Smart punk, huh?" rasped Brady. He got to his feet and dusted off his expensive topcoat. "I was going to tell yuh, anyway."

"Why?" asked Jorgenson. Brady picked up his hat and set it on his head at a rakish angle.

"Because you win, punk."

"What do you mean—I win?"

Brady smiled bleakly.

"We're even. You got nothing to worry about. So long, punk."

He turned, and as he started away threw a final sentence over his shoulder.

"My kid brother was under that tent until a minute ago."

So there was at least one human feel-

[*Turn page*]

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ing in Krag Brady. Jorgenson was too shaken and exhausted to feel astonished as he dragged himself over to the Big Top to help.

An hour later the last of thirty-eight badly, but not seriously hurt, spectators had been shipped to the hospital, and Jorgenson obeyed the beckoning hand of Crowney Young. He was pouring himself a cup of coffee under the stake and chain wagon canopy, and Young was clearing his throat preparatory to speech, when Curly Summers and Big Jim Grogan walked into sight around the wagon.

Except for Rick Jorgenson, Crowney Young was alone because old man Irons was busy arranging to pay off the wounded before they had a chance to dream up big lawsuits.

Young eyed the visitors, and without a word waved at the pail of coffee and some tin dippers. With dignity Big Jim Grogan—so called because he was only five feet six inches tall but tough as a leather boot—nodded acknowledgement, and poured himself a drink. The sullen Summers planted his feet wide apart, and waited.

"Some of my home town folks was caught in that crack," Grogan said in a ridiculously high voice, waving at the fallen Big Top.

He had the face of a tough, humorous little monkey. His eyes glinted sideways but no one answered.

"I'm still shakin' about what might have happened," went on Grogan. "The children and all." He glanced at Rick Jorgenson and then back at Crowney Young. "There's two things we can do," he said incisively. "We worked together just now, and can again. Jumpin' jeepers, I don't want to buck a show that's got canvasmen who are better acrobats than we got in the ring."

Again his eyes darted toward Rick Jorgenson. His hard, tight little mouth relaxed into a wintry smile.

"Now, listen," he said crisply. "We throw both shows in one pot, fifty-fifty. We take out the best of our animal acts, and some human, and make Young-Burnham the best show on earth except the Big Show, and could play competition with Mr. Big without bein' ashamed. The leftovers we play under the Summers name—a smaller show that's no competition and plays different territory. Fifty-fifty right from the jump.

Curly, mebbe, ain't too keen about it."

"I ain't against it," Summers said dully. "Maybe I'm gettin' too old for the rough stuff, and it costs money."

CROWNEY YOUNG was gazing out over the lot, where the savage tear-down was going slowly as iced equipment balked the men. A ring of bonfires lighted up the dark, dismal scene, and half the roustabouts were constantly thawing themselves and drinking coffee around the fires.

"How about it?" Grogan asked. "We just helped you when we could have took the chance to ruin you."

"As you said—helped save your home town folks," Crowney Young said.

"Tell you what I'll do," Grogan said, pacing like an agile little gnome. "My son-in-law runs this town. I'll see to it that none of the hurt people hold you up—that they settle for nickels and dimes, and we'll take care of 'em with jobs and such, if they need anything."

"How come you're so honest all of a sudden?" Young inquired.

Big Jim Grogan's simian face glowed with a wide grin. Sunbursts of wrinkles sprang from the corners of eyes and mouth, and criss-crossed in his sunken, weathered cheeks. [*Turn page*]

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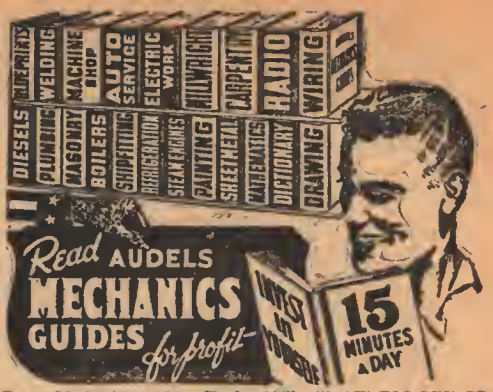

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"To tell yuh the truth," he chuckled, "I turned up my coat collar and put on dark glasses and sneaked into your show myself! I blamed near got my tail-feathers pulled out, and maybe I got religion!"

Head bent thoughtfully, Crowney Young reached absently into the depths of the stake and chain wagon, and brought forth a bottle of whiskey and a column of little glasses, set one in the other. Thoughtfully he poured out four drinks and ceremoniously handed them to his guests and Rick Jorgenson, one at a time. Then he picked up his own.

"Season'll be over in a month," he said. "We got half the winter to talk a deal. Here's to it."

Instinctively Rick Jorgenson knew that the long Summers-Young-Burnham feud was over. Nevertheless he took only a ceremonial taste of his drink. He would be offered a lot more before the day was out, he thought, as he felt his face with tender admiration, but he was going to turn them down. He never could tell when to stop when he got to drinking, and a bender would make his face puffy and his eyes all swollen and bloodshot, and then he wouldn't look so good.

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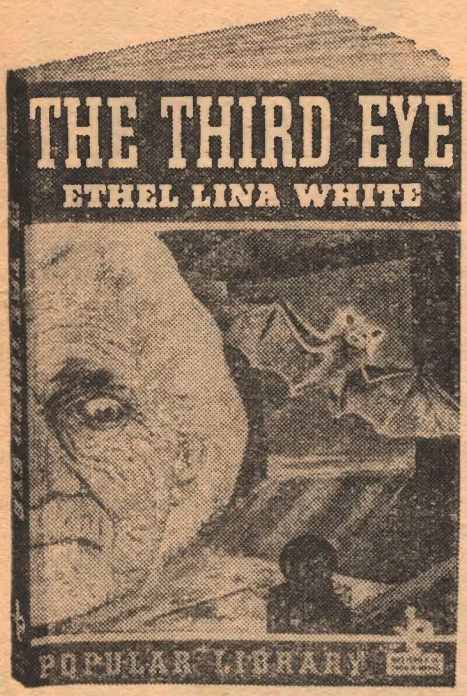

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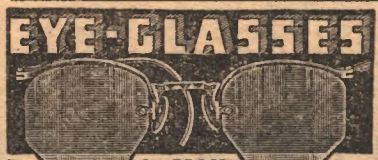

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BOX 3970-Y, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me booklet and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Airplane Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Auto Engine Tune-up
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Aviation ☐ Aviation Mechanic
- ☐ Blueprint Reading
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Bridge Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Concrete Engineering
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrician
- ☐ Electrical Maintenance
- ☐ Foundryman ☐ Heating
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Machinist ☐ Inspector
- ☐ Management of Inventions
- ☐ Marine Engines
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mine Foreman
- ☐ Navigation ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Plastics ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Public Works Engineering
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ R. R. Signalman ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Shipfitting ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Telegraphy ☐ Telephony
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking ☐ Tool Design
- ☐ Welding, Gas and Electric
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

BUSINESS COURSES

- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Cartooning ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Illustrating
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ C. P. Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax Course
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English ☐ High School
- ☐ Managing Men at Work
- ☐ Railway Postal Clerk
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Showcard and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Traffic Management

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- ☐ Advanced Dressmaking
- ☐ Foods and Cookery
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
- ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....*Age*.....*Home Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.
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Diamonds are precious. As you know, the war has greatly limited the supply of genuine diamonds and prices have gone up and up and up—so this offer of a genuine diamond ring for only $4.95 is all the more amazing. Now, may absolutely be your last chance to get a genuine diamond at such an unheard-of low price. Each and every diamond in these rings has been certified to us by the ring manufacturer as an exquisite, rose cut genuine diamond. There is no question of the quality or beauty of this ring and we are glad to send it to you on **10-days' trial** so that you can see for yourself what a wonderful Diamond ring you are getting. **Mail the coupon.**

$4.95 Ten Days Trial

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Matching Design Wedding RING—

Our Gift for Promptness

Deeply embossed, **yellow gold** plate wedding ring matching the genuine diamond solitaire ring in design and beauty included **without extra charge** if your order is received promptly. This lovely wedding ring matches the solitaire and makes the **perfect bridal pair.** You want them both, so don't delay.

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No other type of ring so beautifully expresses the sentiment of true love as a solitaire and this classic romance design, 10 Karat, yellow gold ring sets off the fiery rose cut genuine diamond to the very best advantage. A life-long token of love and affection. Every woman deserves the crowning glory of a lovely, sparkling, genuine diamond engagement ring and with it a lovely wedding ring—if you act today, you can still realize your dreams of owning beautiful rings. **Wear on 10 days money-back guarantee.** Remember, our supply of these wonderful rings is very limited. After our present stock is depleted we will have to turn down orders. Don't be disappointed. Send the coupon right away.

EMPIRE DIAMOND CO.

DEPT. 82-D JEFFERSON, IOWA

SEND NO MONEY

Get-acquainted offer:—Ladies who have always wanted exquisite, expensive-looking diamond rings will be delighted with this opportunity to get a genuine **diamond** solitaire right now when prices are being raised because of scarcity. If you act now, we will send you a smart, new, **10-karat,** Yellow Gold ring set with a genuine, lustrous, rose cut **diamond** center stone. The classic design of this ring is one of the most popular from Broadway to Hollywood and expresses the true sentiment of love and romance. The diamond in this ring is in the latest rose cut for fire and brilliance and is a symphony in mysterious beauty.

On our liberal, **10-day trial** offer you have the opportunity of examining these rings and wearing them or asking your friends about them before deciding whether you want to keep this genuine diamond solitaire or not. Send **no money** with this order, just your name and ring size. Your package will be sent immediately and you pay postman the small price of $4.95 for the Engagement ring plus a few cents for tax and mailing cost on arrival; the matching design Wedding ring is given for promptness. After your rings arrive, you have 10 days to wear them and if for any reason you are not entirely satisfied and do not agree that the solitaire is worth at least several times its small cost you may return the rings and your money will be returned promptly. Don't delay in sending the coupon. War conditions limit our supply of these gorgeous genuine diamond solitaire rings.

FOR YOUR RING SIZE

Use this handy ring measure. Tie string around finger, cut and mark off size on scale at left.

Send This Priority Coupon Today

EMPIRE DIAMOND CO.
Dept. 82-D, Jefferson, Iowa

Send the Genuine Diamond Solitaire Ring and the Wedding Ring in lovely gift box. I understand I can return the rings within 10 days for any reason and you will refund promptly.

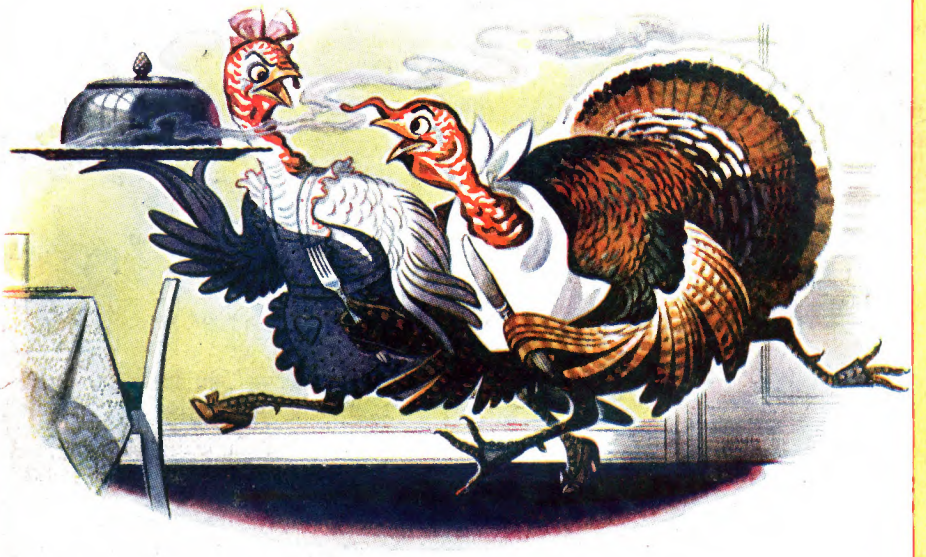
Ring Size.....

Name.....

Address.....

City..... *State*.....

Think twice before you gobble !



Food is the mightiest weapon of all. This holiday season, buy and cook only what you need. Eat it all. Waste nothing. Share with those who need it most. Food Fights for Freedom.

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